



# A GUIDE TO THE PROBLEM OF INDIA

*by*

R. PALME DUTT

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Chapters II-XIII of this book are mainly based on a previous book by the same author, *India To-day*, published by ourselves in 1940 and at present out of print. These sections are considerably condensed from the treatment in the earlier book, and in part re-written, and brought up-to-date.

Chapter I and Chapters XIV-XVI are new.





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## INDIA IN THE WORLD ALLIANCE AGAINST FASCISM

"The present international situation divides the world into two camps—of aggression and anti-aggression. All those who oppose aggression and are striving for the freedom of their country and mankind should join the anti-aggression camp. There is no middle course. . . .

"I sincerely hope and I confidently believe that our ally Great Britain, without waiting for any demands on the part of the people of India, will as speedily as possible give them real political power, so that they may be in a position further to develop their material and spiritual strength and thus realise that their participation in the war is not merely an aid to the anti-aggression nations for the securing of victory, but also a turning point in their struggle for India's freedom. From an objective point of view, I am convinced that this would be the wisest policy, which will redound to the credit of the British Empire."—*Marshal Chiang Kai Shek in February, 1942.*

A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY rests to-day on the British people in relation to India. In the present hour of crisis of human history, when the fortunes of the freedom of mankind are swinging in the balance, the question of India stands in the forefront of world politics. The cause of the freedom of India is bound up with the cause of the freedom of all nations. The policies pursued, alike by the British Government and by the Indian nation, will have far-reaching effects on all countries.

India—this means one-fifth of mankind. India—this means one of the richest territories on earth. India—this means one of the principal strategic bases for world domination. All this Fascism is now trying to conquer. And the present conflict between Britain and India is easing the path for Fascism.

The question of India is no exclusive concern of the Indian nation, or of the British nation, or of the British Empire. It is an international question of common concern to all the nations engaged in the present battle for freedom against Fascism. It is of concern to China, which, as the declaration of Marshal Chiang Kai Shek quoted at the head of this chapter has indicated, desires to see a free India as an equal ally to stand by its side in maintaining the front against the Japanese attack and sustaining the freedom of the Asiatic nations. It is of concern to the United States and Australia, which, as the declarations of their statesmen and Press have abundantly indicated, look to see a free Commonwealth of India as a powerful bastion of democracy in the Pacific. It is of concern to the Soviet Union, which has blazed the trail

in showing to the world in practice how the path of national liberation and equality leads, not to weakness, but to strength, of mutual advantage to the former ruling nation and the former subject nation.

But it is of especial concern and a special responsibility of the British nation; for Britain is still the ruling Power in India. Britain holds the immediate power of decision, which can open the road or bar the road to Indian freedom and equal partnership in the alliance of the United Nations, and thereby settle the immediate fate, not only of the 400 millions of India, and the prospect of the war in Eastern Asia, but, by the consequences of that decision, the whole perspective of the war involving the fate of Britain and every country in the world. Therefore no British citizen can afford to be indifferent to the Indian question or to the responsibility of decision in relation to the British Government's policy.

The alternatives which rest upon that decision are plain, inescapable and urgent.

Either a Free India, fighting as an ally of the United Nations, and mobilising the immense man-power and resources of India for resistance as only a Government of the people's own chosen leaders in whom they have confidence can do, will be able, in co-operation with the allied nations, to bar the road to Japan's further advance and bring an enormous accession of strength to the democratic camp, alike for winning the war and for making the peace and building the future of world co-operation.

Or the refusal of freedom to India, the continuance of crisis and conflict, with the diversion of forces of the ruling Power to tasks of repression, and the passivity, non-co-operation or active hostility of large sections of the population and their political leadership, will open the road to Fascism's sweeping advance, on an even more terrible scale than in the previous experience of Burma, Malaya and the East Indies, weaken the world front of the United Nations and bring into view the menace of immeasurable catastrophe for India and the world.

This is the choice which faces us to-day.

The freedom of India was long urgent and overdue already before the present war. It was vital in the interests of the Indian people, for their own progress and development, to enable them to tackle the formidable problems of mass poverty and backwardness of a long subject and exploited nation. It was vital in the interests of the British people and the world, to end the main basis of the old cancer of imperialist domination and strengthen the advance of world democracy. Had the national leaders of India, who in those crucial years before the war were in the van-

ard of the international anti-fascist front, been in power in India when the war broke out, the present world position would be very different. But the crucial phase of the war to-day, with the direct menace of Fascism to India, as an integral part of the supreme world offensive of Fascism, has raised the question of Indian freedom to the level of an inescapable and immediate challenge which brooks no denial and admits of no delay.

"The situation in India at this moment gives no occasion for undue despondency or alarm." This statement of the British Prime Minister on September 10, 1942—ominously recalling in its complacency similar statements on the eve of the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore—is in striking contrast to the actual position.

What is the present position?

First, Fascism is at the gates of India. Japan's forces directly threaten the land and sea frontiers of India. The further plans of Hitler's offensive, in the event of successes in the Middle East, also look towards India, as the preliminary radio barrage and the utilisation of Bose in Berlin already indicate. The immediate military threat is the Japanese threat. At the time of writing (October, 1942), events have still to reveal whether Japan will attempt the direct invasion of India in the later months of 1942, or whether the field of operations may not develop first in other regions of the Pacific. But the menace is close and obvious (indeed, in the same parliamentary debate on September 10, 1942, Mr. Churchill spoke of "the present state of affairs in India, with invasion not far off"). The intentions of the Japanese militarists are openly proclaimed. And the existence of internal crisis in India increases the danger.

Second, Japan's forces have already, within a few months since Pearl Harbour in December, 1941, overrun a vast area in the south-eastern Pacific, covering close on 1½ million square miles of land and territory (not very much less than the land area of India) and 30 millions of population. This sweeping advance has taken place, despite the existence of considerable Anglo-American-Dutch forces for resistance, powerfully constructed strategic bases and fortifications, and the most confident declarations of leading statesmen, on the eve of disaster, of the impossibility of such an advance. In the subsequent analysis, observers of the most widely varying social and political outlooks have agreed (as notably in the famous dispatches of *The Times* correspondent from Singapore) that the main cause facilitating the rapid Japanese advance was the lack of roots of the colonial governments in the population, the failure to mobilise the populations for defence, the impossibility of holding up the Japanese with only foreign imported

forces, the absence of co-operation between the Governments and the peoples, and the indifference of the mass of the population, with a minority even actively aiding the Japanese.

Third, despite this colossal warning of experience, India is now reproducing this situation, which led to the fall of Burma, Malaya, Hong Kong, Singapore, Java or Borneo, on a far vaster scale and in yet more menacing forms. With Japanese armies on the frontiers, the Indian people are not mobilised for defence. The traditional imperialist strategy still calculates to defend the vast area of India primarily with foreign imported forces, while the inhabitants of India are mainly regarded as a nuisance, or as non-combatant slaves and beasts of burden, to be kept in order. The enrolment of 1 million men in the Indian Army from a population of 400 millions is equivalent to a scale of an army of 100,000 for Britain or less than one-half the peace-time strength of the British army. The vast industrial resources and potential industrial manpower are scarcely mobilised; it was recently boasted that 50,000 workers, or one in 8,000 of the population, were engaged in the Indian munitions factories. A recent decree prohibited the organisation of voluntary defence forces. Neither politically, nor in practical organisation, is there co-operation between the Government and the people, or preparedness for the grim ordeal of war and invasion.

Fourth, there is grave internal crisis and direct conflict between the Government and the popular forces—a situation which had no parallel in Malaya, Borneo, Java or the other regions overrun by Japan, except in Burma, and there only in a far more limited degree. The principal and best known popular leaders, including men who have been international leaders of the anti-fascist fight for a decade, are imprisoned. Mass civil disobedience is threatened, not by a handful of extremists, but by the recognised national organisation of the Indian people, holding an electoral mandate more decisive than most Cabinets of democratic countries. There are sporadic disorders, lathi charges, whipping ordinances, sabotage, arson, police firing, the use of the military against the civil population, resulting in the deaths of hundreds—a conflict which must be watched with grim satisfaction by the Japanese generals on the frontiers or the Axis propagandists in Berlin, and which cannot but provide fertile ground for the operation of Axis agents and *provocateurs*. These disorders are the symptom of the absence of political agreement and co-operation.

If this is not a situation to cause, not "alarm and despondency", but grave and serious concern and determination to remedy it, there is something wrong with the observer. To be satisfied with such a situation is an abdication of statesmanship.

Is this conflict inevitable? Is it the outcome of some blind and suicidal frenzy of a nationalist movement which is incapable of seeing world issues or the menace of the fascist aggressor at the gates? Is the great Indian nationalist movement a "fifth column" for Fascism?

On the contrary. The renegade, Bose, the tool of Berlin, was expelled from the Indian national movement six months before this war began (still in the days of Munich) partly because he was suspected of sympathy for Fascism.

The Indian people are no allies of Fascism. They passionately desire national freedom, and have struggled for it for decades with signal self-sacrifice, heroism and solidarity, in the course of which they have built up through their National Congress a popular movement of millions without parallel in the world—the greatest national movement in the world next to the Chinese, and our natural ally in the fight against Fascism.

Precisely because they stand for freedom, they are opposed to Fascism. Their sympathies are with the United Nations. Their leaders have understood and proclaimed, with a breadth of international outlook rare in a purely national movement, that the cause of Indian freedom is bound up with world freedom and with world victory over Fascism. For the past ten years they have played their part in the front ranks of the international anti-fascist front, for China, for Abyssinia, for Spain, at a time when many of those who to-day in the places of power in Britain dare to denounce them for failing to join up in the fight against Fascism were themselves praising and helping Fascism and betraying China, Abyssinia and Spain. India is far more deeply and sincerely anti-fascist than many National Government Ministers in Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The Indian people have no wish to be overrun by the armies of Japan. They wish to fight in alliance with the United Nations against the aggression of Fascism. Their demand is for a National

<sup>1</sup> Indian political opinion has not forgotten that the present Secretary of State for India, Mr. L. S. Amery, who in his recent broadcast denounced Indian national leaders as "arch-saboteurs" surrendering to Japan, himself declared in the House of Commons on the occasion of Japan's attack on Manchuria:

"I confess that I see no reason whatever why, either in act or in word, or in sympathy, we should go individually or intentionally against Japan in this matter. Japan has got a very powerful case based upon fundamental realities. . . . Who is there among us to cast the first stone and to say that Japan ought not to have acted with the object of creating peace and order in Manchuria and defending herself against the continual aggression of vigorous Chinese nationalism? Our whole policy in India, our whole policy in Egypt, stand condemned if we condemn Japan."

(Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery in the House of Commons, February 24)



Government, in order that they may mobilise their full strength, their man-power and their resources under their own leaders in whom they have confidence, as an ally of the United Nations in the common struggle. "Free India will become the ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribulations of the joint enterprise and struggle for freedom" (Indian National Congress resolution of August 8, 1942).

It is true that they have accompanied this demand with the threat of civil disobedience in the event of refusal—a threat which, if the situation continues to worsen, may become a campaign in practice. Such a policy in the midst of the war of the United Nations against Fascism is equally opposed to the true interests of the Indian nation as of all the nations engaged in the present struggle for freedom. Such a policy can only lead to division of the forces opposed to Fascism, and thus open the way to the fascist enslavement of India and the world. But it is essential for sympathetic British opinion to understand how sincere Indian patriots and anti-fascists, goaded and provoked by the refusal of their reasonable demands, and unable to see any positive alternative policy, felt driven as a last desperate expedient to adopt this policy of non-co-operation, believing it to be their only weapon and their only way to the free mobilisation of the people for the establishment of a National Government and effective defence against Fascism—although, in fact, it could only mean division before Fascism, suicidal to the interests of Indian freedom. It is necessary to recognise that they were pleading to negotiate before launching any campaign—when the arrests precipitated the conflict.

While we must deplore the failure of leadership which could even contemplate such a threat, or launch such a campaign, in this grave hour, we cannot but recognise that the heaviest responsibility rests with the reactionary policy which refused India's just demands and thus provoked such an outcome.

This is the tragedy of the present situation and of the present conflict. It is a conflict which is needless, unjustifiable, indefensible. It is a conflict between opponents of Fascism; between two nations who are equally opposed to Fascism, and who should be equal allies in a common cause.

At this moment of the supreme Axis offensive throughout the world, when the fortunes of the United Nations are swaying in the balance, a nation of four hundred millions, one-fifth of humanity, has been treated as an enemy for the crime of demanding to be an ally. This is the fantastic, but unfortunately true epitome of the present Indian situation.

When all the charges and criticisms in the world have been laid

against the Congress leadership and tactics, the fact remains that the Congress was asking for the recognition of a free India as an ally of the United Nations. This demand, because it was accompanied with the threat of civil disobedience in the event of refusal, was met with police cells, lathi charges, whipping ordinances and firing squads.

To have reached such a position represents a bankruptcy of statesmanship on the part of the ruling Power which parallels the worst military fiascoes of the war. With all the cards stacked against Fascism in India and on the side of the United Nations, with ninety per cent of articulate political opinion eager to fight on the side of the United Nations, the policy pursued up to the present by the Government in India has succeeded in performing the brilliant feat of turning the bulk of this popular movement and feeling into bitter hostility or even active resistance.

What are we to think of a policy which has produced such fruits in practice, however self-righteous and self-satisfied its sponsors appear to be with the outcome? What are we to think of a policy by which a Nehru, a symbol of international anti-fascism, finds himself against his will thrust into a position in which he appears lined up in a front of struggle objectively hindering the war effort of the United Nations against Fascism and opposed to the front of the United Nations as represented by the British Government in India?

We cannot be satisfied with such a position. The situation in India is serious, but not yet irreparable. But we need to act quickly if we are to remedy it in time.

A solution must be found which will make possible the free and honourable co-operation of the great Indian nation in the alliance of the United Nations for the defeat of Fascism and for the freedom of all nations, including India.

Such a solution can be found. An examination of the problem will show that there are no insurmountable obstacles, given the will to overcome the obstacles and the recognition of the urgency of the situation.

But to reach such a solution, British opinion will have to throw aside many time-honoured political prejudices—just as the Indian national movement will need to make, and has in fact shown itself ready to make, far-reaching concessions from its standpoint, granted the essential national demand, in reaching a provisional settlement on a basis of co-operation with a British Viceroy or a British Commander-in-Chief in the present common struggle.

The present hour is too grave for a parade of the old debating points which have in the past been allowed to obscure a sincere and objective discussion of the Indian problem; the hoary proofs

of the incapacity of the Indian people for self-government; the demonstration of the hopeless divisions of the Indian people; the attempted burial of the Indian nation in an ocean of warring communities; the magic telescope to reduce the National Congress (with a more overwhelming electoral majority than any political party in England has ever known) to a microscopic minority, and to inflate minute splinter organisations without membership into weighty representations of the Indian voice; the make-believe with sham constitutions to conceal the absolutism of alien dictatorship; or the wizard's wand of will o' the wisp promises of future constitutions as a substitute for present action. All this paraphernalia of wishful self-deception will have to be ruthlessly thrown overboard; for the present time demands action and statesmanship, not spiteful fairy-tales to hoodwink the public, conceal the truth and prepare disaster.

Democrats who may have been shaken by this conventional anti-democratic propaganda into a conception that they must deny to India what they are simultaneously demanding for the nations of Europe, will do well to remember that all these arguments to prove the present impracticability of Indian self-government have always been used against every subject people on the eve of freedom—until freedom proved their falsity. The same arguments of disunity were used against the American nation on the eve of the American Declaration of Independence—until the American War of Independence exploded them into thin air. But we cannot wish to have an Indian War of Independence in the midst of a world-war against Fascism, in order to resolve the doubts of the sceptics.

British democratic opinion has been too long content to remain indifferent to the Indian question, and to leave the field to the reactionary enemies of democracy who have posed as experts. The truth about modern India has been concealed behind a thick veil of censorship, prejudice and propaganda. All the phantasies and myths which used to be spread a quarter of a century ago by these same experts and semi-official authorities and repeated a millionfold in Press publicity, about the old Tsarist Russia on the eve of the Russian Revolution, before the Russian people took power—the pictures about the millions of moujiks worshipping the Tsar as their "Little Father", and the description of the political revolutionary leaders as a microscopic minority of agitators without mass influence or understanding of the "soul" of Russia—all these have been paralleled and eclipsed by the current publicity about India, about the political situation in India, the outlook of the Indian peasant masses, or the rôle of the national and popular movement. The legends and

calumnies which were spread for a quarter of a century about the Soviet Union, and whose fictitious character has now been universally admitted when the supreme test of war has exposed their falsity, are also a salutary warning to be on guard against this kind of publicity.

British opinion needs now to awaken to the truth about India. The responsibility of judgement is here. Such judgement can only be based on an informed opinion.

The present book has been prepared to assist in the development of such an informed opinion about India. Its aim is to present in rapid summary form for the plain man and woman the essential facts about the Indian situation, the background of the Indian question, and the present crisis of India and the war, and to suggest the possible lines of a provisional solution.

Even if Hitler were to collapse to-morrow, and if the Japanese military power were to dissolve in sudden defeat, the Indian question would remain clamorous for solution, and the responsibility of British democracy would remain. But in fact the solution of the Indian question is a vital preliminary necessity to assist in the speedy defeat of Hitler and Japan. Hence the special urgency of the question to-day.

The plan of the present book corresponds to this task.

Parts I to III deal with the background of the Indian situation; the Indian people, their country and their problems; the record and outcome of British rule in India, and why national emancipation is now a vital necessity for Indian progress and development, to tackle the problems of backwardness, arrested development, the agrarian crisis and mass poverty; the growth of Indian national consciousness, the national movement and the labour and socialist movement; the problems confronting the national movement in respect of the communal question, the rôle of the Princes and political divisions; the relations of imperialism and nationalism, the successive constitutional reforms, and how India is governed to-day. This section concludes with a study of the significance of India for the British Empire, the reasons for the maintenance up to the present of British rule in India and for the resistance of reactionary interests to Indian national liberation, and why those reasons cannot be regarded as valid from the standpoint of the interests of the British people.

These sections are largely based in summarised form on a previous book of the present author, "India To-day", which appeared in 1940 and is at present out of print. Much of what is here treated in condensed form (in part, also, rewritten and brought up-to-date in relation to recent facts and evidence) will be found more fully treated in the previous book; and the reader

who should wish to pursue these questions further, or to query some of the statements and judgements here made with only limited evidence, must be referred to the earlier book for a very much fuller discussion and the fuller evidence in detail of what is here set out.

Part IV is in its entirety newly written, and deals with the present crisis; India and the war; the policy of the national movement; the Cripps Mission; the question of non-co-operation and the ensuing conflict; and the present political situation.

The concluding chapter discusses the possibility of an immediate practical solution in the common interests of the Indian people, the British people and the United Nations.

## PART ONE

# THE PEOPLE OF INDIA AND THEIR COUNTRY

### CHAPTER II

## THE AWAKENING OF INDIA

"When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal situation to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect of the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."—*American Declaration of Independence.*

INDIA is a country with a very old civilisation; but the Indian nation is a young nation. For the Indian people are only in the modern period awakening to their full consciousness and rôle as a nation among the progressive nations of the world.

To understand this awakening of the Indian nation is the key to the understanding of India to-day. The task of political wisdom is to see what is young and growing, not to bury the gaze in what is old and decaying.

India and China stand closely linked in the modern world situation. China, also, is a vast country with a very ancient civilisation; but the Chinese nation is a young nation, advancing to political consciousness and strength only in the modern period. The Indian and Chinese peoples, representing the two leading national liberation movements of the modern world, comprise between one third and one half of humanity.

The Chinese people have already through a long and heroic struggle, since their National Revolution of 1911, won their independence and thrown off the foreign yoke, even if large portions of their territory are still occupied by the Japanese invaders. They have established their National Government. Under its leadership they have mobilised their armed strength against the Japanese aggressors. They have won recognition as an equal ally of the United Nations in the battle for human freedom against Fascism.

The Indian people are aspiring to win their corresponding position as a free and equal nation among the nations of the world,



This is not a question of natural poverty of the country or deficiency of resources. The vast territories occupied by the Indian people enjoy great natural wealth and resources. This is not only true in respect of the fertility of the soil and potentialities of agricultural production, which, as further examination will show, could, if brought into full use, provide abundant supplies for a much greater population than the existing. It is also true in respect of the raw materials for highly developed industrial production, especially coal, iron, oil and water-power, alongside the intelligence and aptitude (not wholly lost from the time when India enjoyed technical primacy among nations, before imperialist rule) of the population.

Yet these resources and possibilities are mainly undeveloped, as the present testing time of war has brought sharply to awareness. If capitalism in general is characterised by waste and relative failure to utilise the full potentialities of production, then this failure reaches a most extreme degree in India.

The basic problem of India is thus a problem of 400 million human beings who are living in conditions of extreme poverty and semi-starvation for the overwhelming majority, and are at the same time living under a foreign rule which holds complete control over their lives and maintains by force the social system leading to these terrible conditions. These hundreds of millions are struggling for life, for the means of life, for elementary freedom. The problem of their struggle, and of how they can realise their aims, is the problem of India.

This is the problem which has now come to a head in a new world situation.

The domination of India has long been the prize of rival imperialist Powers. That domination has not yet ended; and to-day there is added the still more menacing threat of Fascist conquest. But at the same time there is a new factor which has arisen in the modern period, and which is of decisive significance, alike in the present crisis and for the whole future.

India is awakening. India, for thousands of years the prey of successive waves of conquerors, is awakening to independent existence as a united people with their own rôle to play in the world. This awakening has leapt forward in our lifetime. In the last twenty years a new India has emerged. To-day, despite the darkness of the present hour, India's advance to freedom is universally recognised as approaching victory in the near future.

This new awakening India has no intention to be either the victim of the existing imperialist rulers or the prey of the new Fascist aggressors. As the declarations of the national movement have made clear, the awakening Indian people is determined to



take its equal place with the peoples of the world on the side of freedom and world peace. India's advance is heralding a great accession of strength to the forces of the peoples all over the world against the tide of reaction.

Already before the present war the question of the continuance of imperialist rule in India had become an immediate and urgent question, both because of the visible weakening and decline of that rule in the modern period, and of its conspicuous failure to solve the problems of the people of the country, and also because of the increasing awakening and determination of the Indian people to win their freedom.

Over the record of the past quarter of a century since the last war all the efforts of imperialism at adaptation to the new conditions, all the alternating waves of coercion and concession did not succeed in damming the advancing tide of the national movement, nor were they able to bring any solution to the problem of India.

The immediate aim of the Indian national movement is national independence and the democratic right of self-government. This is the indispensable first step, both for the effective defence of India and mobilisation of the people in the present crisis, and in order to advance to tackle the further heavy problems which confront the Indian people.

Every stage of civilisation and of culture within class-society, from the most primitive to the most advanced, exists in India. The widest range of social, economic, political and cultural problems thus find their sharpest expression in Indian conditions. The problems of the relations and co-existence of differing races and religions; the battle against old superstitions and decaying social forms and traditions: the fight for education; the fight for the liberation of women; the question of the reorganisation of agriculture and of the development of industry, and of the relationship of town and country; the issues of class conflict in the most manifold and acute forms; the problems of the relationship of nationalism and socialism: all these varied issues of the modern world press forward with especial sharpness and urgency in India.

The people of India have already played a great part in world history, not as conquerors, but in the sphere of culture, thought, art and industry. To-day they need to play their part in war in order to defeat the Fascist aggressor, and to advance as a free people to the solution of their own problems. The national and social liberation of the Indian people will bring great new wealth to humanity.

## THE WEALTH OF INDIA

"The most arresting fact about India is that her soil is rich and her people poor."—*M. L. Darling, "The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt," 1925, p. 73.*

INDIA is a country of poor people. But it is not a poor country.

Not only are the natural resources of India exceptionally favourable for the highest degree of prosperity for the population through combined agricultural and industrial development, but it is also the case that prior to British rule Indian economic development stood well to the forefront in the world scale.

The Indian Industrial Commission of 1916-18 opened its report with the statement:

"At a time when the West of Europe, the birthplace of the modern industrial system, was inhabited by uncivilised tribes, India was famous for the wealth of her rulers and for the high artistic skill of her craftsmen. And even at a much later period, when merchant adventurers from the West made their first appearance in India, the industrial development of this country was at any rate not inferior to that of the more advanced European nations."

(Indian Industrial Commission Report, p. 6.)

Sir Thomas Holland, the Chairman of the Commission and the leading authority on Indian mineral resources, reported in 1908:

"The high quality of the native-made iron, the early anticipation of the processes now employed in Europe for the manufacture of high-class steels, and the artistic products in copper and brass gave India at one time a prominent position in the metallurgical world."

("The Mineral Resources of India", report by T. H. Holland, 1908.)

It will be observed that iron and steel production had already reached a high degree of development; to this extent the material conditions for the advance to modern industry were present.

The causes that led to the destruction of this leading position under British rule, and the relegation of India to a backward economic situation, will be examined in later chapters.

No less universally admitted is the fact that the natural resources exist for the highest modern economic development in India.

In respect of agriculture the judgement of Sir George Watt, Reporter on Economic Products to the Government of India, may be quoted:

"It seems safe to affirm that with the extension of irrigation, more thorough and complete facilities of transport, improvements in methods and materials of agriculture, and the expansion of the area of cultivation . . . the productiveness of India might easily be increased by at least 50%. Indeed, few countries in the world can be said to possess so brilliant an agricultural prospect, if judged of purely by intrinsic value and extent of undeveloped resources."

(Sir George Watt, "Memorandum on the Resources of British India", Calcutta, 1894, p. 5.)

Even more striking are the potential resources for industrial development. India possesses abundant supplies of coal, iron, oil, manganese, gold, lead, silver and copper.

Sir Edwin Pascoe, late Director of the Geological Survey of India, reported in 1931 :

"India possessed large reserves of coal, estimated at 36,000,000,000 tons. . . . India also had potentialities as a first-rate producer of iron and steel, but the industry was still in its infancy. Of manganese, one of the hardening constituents of steel, India produced a third of the world's supply."

(Sir Edwin Pascoe, lecture at the Imperial Institute, *The Times*, March 13, 1931.)

Especially important are the iron-ore deposits, which amount, according to a conservative estimate, to 3,000 million tons, as against 2,254 million tons for Great Britain and 1,374 million tons for Germany, and are only exceeded by the United States with 9,885 million tons and France with 4,369 million tons (Cecil Jones, of the Geological Survey of India, *Capital*, Supplement, December 19, 1929). "India's iron-ores are so immense in volume and so rich in iron contents, that they might be said to be wasted if not utilised at present, for her production might be the same as the average production of other countries such as the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Spain and Russia, in which the average production was 16.2 million tons as compared with 1.8 million in India. In other words, the production in India was only a little over 11% of what it should have been and 89% might be regarded as wastage." (R. K. Das, "The Industrial Efficiency of India", 1930, p. 17.)

The Industrial Commission Report in 1918 stated :

"The nature and extent of the mineral resources of India have been systematically examined by the Geological Survey Department, although it has been impossible for it with the limited funds for establishment and prospecting equipment to carry its

investigations, except in very special cases, to a point which would warrant commercial exploitation without further detailed enquiry.

"The mineral deposits of the country are sufficient to maintain most of the so-called 'key' industries, except those that require vanadium, nickel and possibly molybdenum. . . ."

(Indian Industrial Commission Report, p. 36.)

It will be noted that "limited funds for establishment and prospecting equipment" are allowed to prevent the Geological Survey Department from carrying its investigations sufficiently far to make possible the exploitation of these vast potential resources for Indian wealth, which are thus merely recorded on paper as an astronomer might map the stars.

Even more significant are the potentialities of water-power for the electrification of India and the neglect of these potentialities. The following table shows the water-power resources of leading countries of the world and the proportion of their use (*World Almanac*, 1932), compared with India:

#### WATER-POWER RESOURCES

Country.	In million horse-power.		Percentage developed.
	Potential.	Developed.	
United States . . . . .	35.0	11.7	33
Canada . . . . .	18.2	4.5	25
France . . . . .	5.4	2.1	37
Japan . . . . .	4.5	1.7	37
Italy . . . . .	3.8	1.8	47
Switzerland . . . . .	2.5	1.8	72
Germany . . . . .	2.0	1.1	55
India . . . . .	27.0	0.8	3

India stands second only to the United States in water-power resources, yet uses only 3 per cent, compared to 72 per cent in Switzerland, 55 per cent in Germany, 47 per cent in Italy, 37 per cent in France and Japan and 33 per cent in the United States.

A recent American observer, Professor Buchanan, after a monumental survey of economic and industrial development in India up to 1934, reaches the melancholy conclusion:

"Here was a country with all the crude elements upon which manufacturing depends, yet during more than a century it has imported factory-made goods in large quantities and has developed only a few of the simplest industries for which machinery and organisation had been highly perfected in other

countries. With abundant supplies of raw cotton, raw jute, easily mined coal, easily mined and exceptionally high-grade iron ore; with a redundant population often starving because of lack of profitable employment; with a hoard of gold and silver second perhaps to that of no other country in the world; . . . with an excellent market within her own borders and near at hand in which others were selling great quantities of manufactures; with all these advantages, India, after a century, was supporting only about two per cent of her population by factory industry."

(D. H. Buchanan, "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India", 1934, p. 450.)

On every side of Indian economy the same picture is revealed of limitless potential wealth and actual neglect and failure of development under the existing régime. The menace of this situation is felt by the imperialists themselves, even though they have no solution to offer. In the warning words of Sir Alfred Watson, the Editor of the leading English journal in India, the *Calcutta Statesman*, and Calcutta correspondent of *The Times*, at a meeting of the Royal Empire Society in 1933:

"Sir Alfred Watson said that industrially India was a land of missed opportunities, and that the main blame for this rested heavily on the British. . . . Though India possessed in abundance all the conditions for a great industrial country, she was to-day one of the backward nations of the world economically, and was very backward in industry. . . . We had never tackled seriously the problem of developing India's undoubted capacity for industry. . . .

"Unless India could provide in the coming years a wholly unprecedented industrial development based on growth of demand by her vast population, the level of subsistence of the country, which was now appallingly low, would fall below the starvation point."

(Sir Alfred Watson, lecture to the Royal Empire Society, *The Times*, January 4, 1933.)

The stress of war has revealed still more sharply the consequences of this failure to develop Indian industrial potentialities. In 1941 the semi-official journal "Great Britain and the East" reported:

"In spite of her vast resources of minerals and man-power, India had to restrict most of her war effort to supplies of raw materials. Unlike the last war, there has been very little industrial expansion."

("Great Britain and the East", June 19, 1941.)

And in 1942 the American journal *Pacific Affairs* estimated the position:

"There is in fact considerable evidence that, though Great Britain was engaged in a life and death struggle in which additional industrial production in India was of vital importance, British policy during the first two years of the war continued to be dominated by commercial motives, and was therefore strongly opposed to any rapid or extensive growth of Indian-controlled heavy industries. . . . By the autumn of 1941 only the smallest beginning had been made in the development of the metallurgical, chemical and other heavy industries for which India possessed all the necessary raw materials."

(K. Mitchell, "India's Economic Potential", *Pacific Affairs*, March, 1942.)

Since then the American Technical Mission to India in the spring and summer of 1942 has reported on the necessity of "a basic change in production technique", and has initiated certain measures. But the results are still extremely limited.

The glaring contrast between India's productive potentialities and the failure to utilise them remains unresolved under the existing regime. This policy of throttling Indian industrial development, already criminal in peacetime against the interests and needs of the Indian people, becomes doubly criminal to-day, when these resources are urgently needed for defence against Fascism.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE POVERTY OF INDIA

"The poverty-stricken masses are to-day in the grip of an ever more abject poverty and destitution, and this growing disease urgently and insistently demands a radical remedy. Poverty and unemployment have long been the lot of our peasantry and industrial workers; to-day they cover and crush other classes also—the artisan, the trader, the small merchant, the middle-class intelligentsia. For the vast millions of our countrymen the problem of achieving national independence has become an urgent one, for only independence can give us the power to solve our economic and social problems and end the exploitation of our masses."—*Election Manifesto of the Indian National Congress*, August 1936.

#### I. Facts

It is against this background of the real potential wealth of India and the failure to develop it that the terrible poverty of the Indian population stands out with ominous significance.

Indian statistics, though voluminous in quantity for all the purposes of the functioning of the administrative machine, are

extremely poor and deficient in quality when it comes to the questions of the condition of the people. There is no authoritative estimate of national income or average income (the results of various official enquiries have been kept private and confidential), just as there are no regular statistics, for India or British India as a whole, of total production, of wage rates or the average level of wages, of hours or labour conditions, no adequate health statistics or statistics of housing.

A series of estimates of average income per head have been made, and have been the subject of sharp controversy. These include the following from 1868 up to the post-war period.

### ESTIMATES OF NATIONAL INCOME

Estimate by—	Official or un-official.	Year when made.	Relating year.	Annual Income per head	
				Rupees.	Shillings.
D. Naoroji <sup>1</sup>	Unofficial	1876	1868	20	40
Baring and Barbour	Official	1882	1881	27	45
Lord Curzon	Official	1901	1897-98	30	40
W. Digby <sup>2</sup>	Unofficial	1902	1899	18	24
Findlay Shirras <sup>3</sup>	Official	1924	1911	49	65
Wadia and Joshi	Unofficial	1925	1913-14	44½	59
Shah and Khambata <sup>5</sup>	Unofficial	1924	1921-22	74	95
Simon Report	Official	1930	1921-22	116	155
V. K. V. Rao <sup>6</sup>	Unofficial	1939	1925-29	78	117
Central Banking Enquiry Committee (agricultural population only)	Official	1931	1928	42	63
Findlay Shirras <sup>7</sup>	Official	1932	1931	63	94½
Sir James Grigg <sup>8</sup>	Official	1938	1937-38	56	84

<sup>1</sup> D. Naoroji, "Poverty and Un-British Rule in India", 1876.

<sup>2</sup> W. Digby, "Prosperous British India", 1902.

<sup>3</sup> G. Findlay Shirras, "The Science of Public Finance", 1924.

<sup>4</sup> Wadia and Joshi, "The Wealth of India", 1925.

<sup>5</sup> Shah and Khambata, "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India", 1924.

<sup>6</sup> V. K. V. Rao, "India's National Income", 1939.

<sup>7</sup> G. Findlay Shirras, "Poverty and Kindred Economic Problems in India", 1932.

<sup>8</sup> Sir James Grigg, Finance Member of the Government of India, Budget speech in the Central Legislative Assembly, April, 1938.

Even the "most optimistic" estimate by the official Simon Commission of the average Indian's income amounts to 5d. a day in 1921-22.

To get closer to the real facts to-day, however, it is necessary to make corrections for the factors left out of account.

The Government Index of Indian Prices fell from 236 in 1921 to 125 in 1936—a drop of nearly one half. This drop has affected most acutely agricultural prices, the main basis of Indian income. Between 1921 and 1936 the Index of retail prices of food grains shows a fall, for rice from 355 to 178, for wheat from 360 to 152, for grain from 406 to 105, for barley from 325 to 134—a general drop of more than one half.

*Thus, allowing for this collapse of agricultural prices, the Simon Commission's 5d. a day for 1921-22 becomes for 1936 more like 2½d. a day.*

This, however, is only a gross average income, not the actual income of the overwhelming majority. From it have to be deducted the heavy home charges and tribute of imperialism (interest on debt, dividends on British capital investments, banking and financial commissions, etc.) drawn out of India without return in the shape of imported goods. This drain is estimated by Shah and Khambata at a little over one tenth of the gross national income. The 2½d. thus becomes 2¼d.

Next, allowance has to be made for the extreme inequality of income covered in the average. Professor K. T. Shah and K. J. Khambata in their "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India" (1924) showed that 1 per cent of the population gets one-third of the national income, while 60 per cent of the population get 30 per cent of the income. This means that for the 60 per cent or majority of the population any gross figure of the average national income per head must be exactly halved to represent what they actually get.

*Thus, applying the statistics of the division of income to the Simon Commission's "most optimistic" estimate, after allowing for the subsequent fall of prices and the drain of home charges and tribute, we reach the conclusion that the average Indian of the majority of the population at the present day gets from 1d. to 1¼d. a day.*

What do these figures mean in living conditions? The leading Indian economists, Shah and Khambata, express it as follows:

"The average Indian income is just enough either to feed two men in every three of the population, or give them all two in place of every three meals they need, on condition that they all consent to go naked, live out of doors all the year round, have no amusement or recreation, and want nothing else but food, and that the lowest, the coarsest, the least nutritious."

(Shah and Khambata, "The Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India", 1924, p. 253).

In 1929 the Government appointed a Royal Commission on Labour in India. It found that "in most industrial centres the



proportion of families and individuals who are in debt is not less than two thirds of the whole . . . in the great majority of cases the amount of debt exceeds three months' wages and is often far in excess of this amount" (p. 224). It found wages ranging from the most favourable average for Bombay textile workers of 56s. a month for men and 26s. for women; for Bombay unskilled workers, 30s. a month; for coal-miners in the principal Jharria coal-field, an average of from 15s. to 22s. a month; for workers in seasonal factories, from 6d. to 1s. a day for men, and from 4d. to 9d. a day for women; for unskilled workers in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, 9d. a day for men, 6d. for women and 4d. for children, and in Madras and the United Provinces, as low as 5d. a day for men. It found that in the "unregulated" factories and industries, in which the overwhelming majority of Indian industrial workers are employed, and where no factory legislation applies, "workers as young as five years of age may be found in some of these places working without adequate meal intervals or weekly rest days, and often for 10 or 12 hours daily, for sums as low as 2 annas [ $2\frac{1}{2}$ d.] in the case of those of tenderest years" (p. 96).

In respect of housing, the average working-class family does not even enjoy one room, but more often shares part of a room. In 1911 69 per cent of the total population of Bombay were living in one-room tenements (as against 6 per cent in London in the same year), averaging 4.5 persons per tenement. The 1931 census showed that 74 per cent of the total population of Bombay were living in one-room tenements—thus revealing an increase in overcrowding after two decades.

As for sanitation, the Whitley report found:

"Neglect of sanitation is often evidenced by heaps of rotting garbage and pools of sewage, whilst the absence of latrines enhances the general pollution of air and soil. Houses, many without plinths, windows and adequate ventilation, usually consist of a single small room, the only opening being a doorway too low to enter without stooping. In order to secure some privacy, old kerosene tins and gunny bags are used to form screens which further restrict the entrance of light and air. In dwellings such as these, human beings are born, sleep and eat, live and die" (p. 271).

The Bombay Labour Office enquiry into working-class budgets in 1932-33 found that in respect of water supply 26 per cent of the tenements had one tap for eight tenements and less, 44 per cent had one tap for nine to fifteen tenements, and 29 per cent had one tap for sixteen tenements and over (Report of Enquiry into Working-Class Budgets in Bombay, 1935). Eighty-five per cent.

had only one privy for eight tenements or less; 12 per cent had one privy for nine to fifteen tenements, and 24 per cent had one privy for sixteen tenements and over.

An Indian woman doctor, appointed by the Bombay Government to investigate, reported:

"In one room on the second floor of a chawl, measuring some 15 by 12 feet, I found six families living. Six separate ovens on the floor proved this statement. On enquiry, I ascertained that the actual number of adults and children living in this room was 30. . . . Three out of six of the women who lived in this room were shortly expecting to be delivered. . . . The atmosphere at night of that room filled with smoke from six ovens and other impurities would certainly physically handicap any woman and infant both before and after delivery. This was one of many such rooms I saw. In the rooms in the basement of a house conditions were far worse. Here daylight with difficulty penetrated, sunlight never."

(*Bombay Labour Gazette*, September 1922, p. 31.)

The effects of these conditions—of semi-starvation, overcrowding and no sanitation—on health can be imagined. They are reflected in a recorded death rate of 23·6 per thousand in 1935, compared with 12·3 for England and Wales. The expectation of life for an Indian is less than half that of an inhabitant of England and Wales.

"The average length of life in India is low as compared with that in most of the Western countries; according to the census of 1921, the average for males and females was respectively 24·8 and 24·7 years, or a general average of 24·75 years in India as compared with 55·6 years in England and Wales. It was found to have decreased further in 1931, being 23·2 and 22·8 years for males and females respectively."

("Industrial Labour in India", International Labour Office, 1938, p. 8, based on Census of India, 1931, p. 98.)

They are reflected in a maternal mortality rate of 24·5 per thousand live births compared with 4·1 in England and Wales. They are reflected in the contrast between the death rate of 41·05 per thousand for Ahmedabad City, where the Indian people live under the conditions just described, and 12·84 for Ahmedabad Cantonment, where the Europeans live with every lavish provision for their own health and convenience. They are reflected in an infantile death rate of 164 out of every thousand born within one year for India, during 1935, contrasting with 57 for England and Wales, and reaching to 239 in Calcutta, 248 in Bombay and 227 in Madras (much higher in the one-room tenements; thus

in Bombay in 1926 the rate in one-room tenements was 577 per thousand births, in two-room tenements 254 per thousand, and in hospitals 107 per thousand).

Deaths in India are mainly ascribed in the official records to "fevers" (3.8 millions out of 6.6 millions in British India in 1935)—a conveniently vague term to cover the effects of semi-starvation, poverty conditions and their consequences in ill-health. That three deaths in four in India are due to "diseases of poverty" is the judgement of the standard economic authority on India, a writer sympathetic to imperialism:

"20.5 out of a total death-rate of 26.7 per thousand of the population, in 1926, were accounted for by cholera, small-pox, plague, 'fevers', dysentery and diarrhoea—nearly all of which may be considered to fall under the heading of 'diseases of poverty', and most of which may be considered to be preventable."

(V. Anstey, "The Economic Development of India", 1936, p. 69.)

This is the situation of the people of India after 180 years of imperialist rule.

It is important to note that this situation of poverty is not a static one. It is a dynamic and developing one. This worsening of the situation is connected with the growing agrarian crisis under the conditions of imperialist rule, which is the most powerful driving force to basic social and political change.

## 2. Causes.

What lies behind this terrible poverty of the Indian people?

Before we can begin to consider the real causes, it is necessary to clear out of the way some of the current superficial explanations which are often made a substitute for serious analysis.

Typical of these is the explanation of Indian poverty in terms of the social backwardness, ignorance and superstition of the masses of the people (conservatism in technique, caste restrictions, cow-worship, neglect of hygiene, the position of women, etc.). Undoubtedly these factors play a formidable rôle in Indian poverty, and the overcoming of all such retrogressive features is a leading part of the task of reconstruction before the Indian people. But when these factors are declared to be the explanation of Indian poverty, then the cart is put before the horse. The social and cultural backwardness is the expression and consequence of the low economic level and political subjection, and not vice versa. Illiteracy can be the condemnation of a government which refuses education and holds a people in ignorance, but not of the people which is refused the opportunity to learn. The root problem economic-political, and the cultural problem depends on this.

The social and cultural backwardness cannot be overcome by preaching uplift or giving lectures on health, while the grinding poverty remains the same and defeats all such efforts. It can only be overcome by a change in the material basis of organisation, which is the key to open every other door.

The truth of this analysis has been abundantly shown by the example of the Soviet Union. The poverty and low level of the people under Tsarism were commonly explained by the learned as the inevitable consequence of the supposed innate backwardness of the Russian peasantry. But once the workers and peasants combined to throw off their exploiters, they showed themselves capable of a technical and cultural progress which outstripped the rate of the most advanced countries. The same will be shown, through whatever different forms and stages of development the process may have to pass, in India.

No less widely current is the oft-repeated explanation of Indian poverty as the supposed consequence of "over-population".

Of all the "easy lies that comfort cruel men" the myth of over-population as the cause of poverty under capitalism is the grovtest. Its modern vogue dates, as is well known, from the reactionary parson Malthus, who, indeed, came out with nothing new, but produced his theory appositely in 1768 as a political weapon (as the title of his work declared) against the French Revolution and liberal theories, and was rewarded with a professorship at the East India Company's college. His theory "was greeted with jubilation by the English oligarchy as the great destroyer of all hankerings after human development" (Marx, "Capital", Vol. I, ch. xxv.), and, though laughed at by scientists and economists of all schools, has remained the favourite philosophy of reaction. Its argument rested on the assumption of placing arbitrary iron limits to the possibilities of productive development at the very moment when productive development was entering on its greatest expansion.

The experience of the nineteenth century smashed it, when the expansion of wealth so glaringly exceeded the growth of population and revealed the causes of poverty to lie elsewhere. In the twentieth century, especially after the World War and with the world economic crisis, attempts were made to revive it. The existence of international statistics, however, killed it again; the fact that, despite the wholesale destruction of the war and after, world production of foodstuffs, of raw materials and of industrial goods showed a continuous increase far exceeding the growth of world population compelled men to look for the cause of their miseries in the social system. The ruling class began to find their problem how to restrict the production of wealth, and produced many ingenious schemes for this purpose; while in

respect of population, their complaint became that the peoples of Europe and America were not producing enough babies for the needs of cannon-fodder. Less wealth and more human beings became the cry of the modern ruling class, reversing Malthus.

Driven from Europe and America, this discredited theory of old-fashioned reaction now tries to find its last lair in Asia. The poverty of India and China is solemnly ascribed, not to the social system, but to "over-population". The beneficent effects of imperialist rule, it is declared, having eliminated war from the Indian continent, have unfortunately removed the blessed "natural checks" to the growth of population and permitted the improvident and prolific Indian people to breed beyond the limits of subsistence. Hence the growing pressure on the land and semi-starvation conditions which are the inevitable natural consequence of the benevolence of British rule. These can only be changed when the Indian people learn to limit their rate of growth to something more like the proportions of the sensible European peoples.

What are the facts?

In the first place, all the above arguments convey the picture of an enormously rapid increase of Indian population under British rule, extending far beyond the rate of increase of other countries, and therefore leading to a situation of extreme poverty owing to this abnormally rapid multiplication of population. How many realise that the actual facts of the history of India under British rule reveal the exact opposite?

*The actual rate of increase of population in India under British rule has been markedly less than that of almost any European country, and is even near the bottom in the general scale of world increase.*

For the period as a whole estimates only can be used, since the first census was not taken in India till 1872. The population of India at the end of the sixteenth century has been estimated by Moreland ("India at the Death of Akbar", p. 22) at 100 millions. To-day the figure is 400 millions. This makes an increase of four times in over three centuries. The population of England and Wales in 1700, according to the first careful estimate (that of Finlaison, the Government Actuary in the Preface to the Census Returns of 1831), was 5.1 millions. To-day the figure is 41 millions. That makes an increase of eight times in a shorter period of two and one-third centuries. The increase in England has been at a rate considerably more than double that of India.

More important is the modern period, after the special expansion in Europe associated with the industrial revolution had begun to slow down. We may take first the comparison of India and Europe up to the war, in order to keep out of account the complications resulting from the war and the changes of territories in the

European countries. Here are the figures for the rate of increase of population for India and the leading European countries between 1870 and 1910.

# INCREASE OF POPULATION, 1870-1910

	Increase per cent.
India . . . . .	18.9
England and Wales . . . . .	58.0
Germany . . . . .	59.0
Belgium . . . . .	47.8
Holland . . . . .	62.0
Russia . . . . .	73.9
Europe (average) . . . . .	45.4

(B. Narain, "Population of India", 1925, p. 11.)

*With the exception of France, the rate of growth in India was less than that of any European country.*

Only in the recent period since 1921 has the rate of increase in India (10.6 per cent in 1921-31, as against 14.2 per cent for the United States in the same period and 17.9 per cent for the Soviet Union; and 15 per cent in 1931-41) been higher than that of England and the Western European countries. But the problem of poverty in India does not date from after 1921.

Summing up for the three decades 1900-30, Professor Thomas writes:

"Between 1900 and 1930 population in India increased by 19 per cent, but production of foodstuffs and raw materials increased by about 30 per cent, and industrial production by 189 per cent.

"All this indicates that population has not outstripped production. . . . The alarm about population outstripping production is not supported by statistics. Those who are alarmed about the 'devastating torrent of babies' in India will do well to direct their attention to improvements in the distribution of national income, in the quality of consumption, and in the geographical distribution of population, and to other allied matters."

(Professor P. J. Thomas, in *The Times*, October 24, 1935.)

The verdict of facts thus shows that the cause of poverty in India cannot be ascribed to the increase of population going forward more rapidly than the increase in the production of means of subsistence, since the latter increased more rapidly. The cause of poverty must be sought elsewhere.

This is not to say that the existing production of the means of subsistence, under the existing conditions of ownership, tenure, technique, parasitism and waste of the available labour forces of the population, is adequate for the needs of the population. On the contrary, it is grossly inadequate. Professor Radhakamal

Mukerjee, in his book "Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions" (1938), has shown that, while existing food requirements in India may be estimated at a minimum daily ration of 2,800 calories per head, existing food supplies, on the basis of 1931 returns, give 2,337 calories. The total food requirements for all India in 1935 are estimated by him at 321.5 billion calories, the actual food supplies in the same year at 280.4 billion calories—a deficiency of 12.8 per cent, apart from the question of food exports and maldistribution.

These facts are an indictment of the existing social and economic organisation, which fails to utilise and develop the abundant natural resources of India to supply the needs of the population. But they are not a proof of over-population. On the contrary, it is universally admitted by the experts that a correct utilisation of Indian resources could support on an abundant standard a considerably larger population than exists or is in prospect in any near future in India. More than one-third of the existing cultivable area in India has not yet been brought into cultivation; the existing cultivated area is cultivated under such restricted primitive conditions as to result in a yield per acre about one-third of that obtained for a similar crop (comparing wheat yields) with less man-power in the United Kingdom. The overcoming of the obstacles which stand in the way of such a full utilisation of Indian resources is the real heart of the problem for overcoming Indian poverty.

The decisive difference between India and the European countries is not in the rate of growth of population, which has been more rapid in the European countries. What makes the difference between the conditions of India and Europe is that the economic development and expansion of production which have taken place in the European countries, and have facilitated a more rapid growth of population, have not taken place in India, and have, as we shall see, been artificially arrested by the workings and requirements of British capitalism, driving an increasing proportion of the population into dependence on a primitive and overburdened agriculture. While the wealth of the country has been drained, while industrial and other outlets and development have been checked and thwarted, the agriculture which has been made the over-burdened sole source of subsistence for the mass of the people has itself been placed under crippling conditions and condemned to neglect and deterioration.

Herein, and not in any natural causes outside human agency or control, nor in any mythical causes of a non-existent over-population, but in the social-economic conditions under imperialist rule, lies the secret of the extreme poverty of the Indian people.

# PART TWO

## BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

### CHAPTER V

#### MYTHS AND REALITIES

"There yet remains a class, the general one,  
Which has no merit, and pretends to none;  
Good easy folk who know that eels are eels,  
But never pause to think how skinning feels,  
Content to know that eels are made to slay,  
And Indians formed by destiny to pay . . .  
And hence when they become the great and high,  
There is no word they hate so much as—Why?"

*"India": A Poem in Three Cantos. By a Young Civilian of Bengal.  
London, 1834.*

#### 1. Censorship

ANY SERIOUS approach to Indian problems has first to overcome a thick outwork of barriers and barbed-wire defences, of censorship and prejudice, of official indifference and hostility, unscientific information and propagandist myths.

The conditions of war have deepened the censorship which at all times rests over India.

In a famous passage the leader of nineteenth-century English Conservatism wrote of English history:

"If the history of England be ever written by one who has the knowledge and the courage, and both qualities are equally necessary for the undertaking, the world would be more astonished than when reading the annals of Niebuhr. Generally speaking, all the great events have been distorted, most of the important causes concealed, some of the principal characters never appear, and all who figure are so misunderstood and misrepresented that the result is a complete mystification."

(Disraeli, "Sybil", ch. iii.)

If this is true of English history, how much more is it true of that history which deals with the deepest basis of power of the English ruling class, its inexhaustible reservoir of strength against every rival, and its decisive field of activity, governing all its policies for three centuries—the history of the British Empire, which means, above all, the history of British dominion in India?



The most recent historians of India in an interesting Bibliographical Note have remarked on this transformation from "frankness" to what they term a "silent censorship" in the past half-century:

"Of general histories of British India, those written a century or more ago are, with hardly an exception, franker, fuller and more interesting than those of the last fifty years. In days when no one dreamed that anyone would be seditious enough to ask really fundamental questions (such as 'What right have you to be in India at all?') and when no one ever thought of any public but a British one, criticism was lively and well-informed, and judgement was passed without regard to political exigencies. Of late years, increasingly and no doubt naturally, all Indian questions have tended to be approached from the standpoint of administration: 'Will this make for easier and quieter government?' The writer of to-day inevitably has a world outside his own people, listening intently and as touchy as his own people, as swift to take offence. 'He that is not for us is against us.' This knowledge of an overhearing even eavesdropping public, of being *in partibus infidelium*, exercises a constant silent censorship, which has made British-Indian history the worst patch in current scholarship."

(E. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, "Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India", 1934, p. 665.)

But in fact this is not only a question of past history. It is, above all, a question of present treatment and information. Nor is it only a question of an ideal "censorship" in the anxious heart of the official apologist. It is a question of a very real censorship which is exercised with a most formidable mechanism alike within India and between India and the outer world.

Within India (even before war conditions) the existing Press censorship, inaugurated in its modern form with the Indian Press Act of 1910, and successively sharpened and intensified to the draconic Press Law of 1932 (incorporated in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1932, Sections 14, 15 and 16), which openly proclaims the aim, not only of censorship, but of "control of the Press", alongside a host of subsidiary regulations, such as the Foreign Relations Act of 1932 and the States Protection Act of 1934, heavily shackles the Press.

At the same time a rigid and arbitrary censorship debars most Left literature from India, thus endeavouring to cut off Indian thought and opinion from contact with the outer world. Further, the supply of news from the outer world is virtually monopolised by a single agency (with an associated agency for internal Indian

news), which receives heavy financial payments and other privileges from the Government.

This attempted iron ring of isolation round India works both ways. It also cuts off the outside world from effective news of what is happening in India. Cable monopoly prevents any but the most misleading, hand-picked and censored news of what is happening in India reaching the British public, conceals the worst realities of imperialist exploitation, and excludes any real reflection of Indian opinion and expression.

The English citizen who wishes seriously to acquaint himself with conditions and happenings in India, or with Indian opinion, must accordingly be prepared to face considerable difficulties, and to approach his enquiries with the understanding that the facts are likely to be considerably different from the bland official pictures.

## *2. The Rôle of Imperialism*

While a barbed-wire entanglement is thus set up between India and the outer world to hamper any adequate serious interchange of information and opinion, at the same time a riot of imperialist propaganda, from school textbooks to broadcast reports, builds up in the minds of the British public a mythical picture of the real situation in India and the British rôle in India.

The general character of this picture is familiar.

British rule is presented as a pioneer of civilisation, engaged with self-sacrificing devotion in the uphill task of bringing peace, enlightenment and progress to the ignorant and backward Indian people, steeped in degraded religious superstition and racial rivalries.

British ideals of liberalism and democracy are supposed to be in process of being implanted in this ungrateful soil, along the path of gradual constitutional reform to the final aim of full democratic institutions.

Indian mass discontent and revolt are presented as the artificial product of a handful of extremist agitators. The Indian National Congress is pictured as a handful of middle-class intelligentsia, wholly unrepresentative of the "voiceless millions" of the Indian peasantry (whose true protector and representative is supposed to be the British ruling class official).

Without foreign rule, it is claimed, Indians would be immediately at one another's throats (having not yet learned the standards of European civilisation signally demonstrated since 1914); India would be a sea of blood and anarchy, and fall immediately a prey to a foreign invader.

It is unnecessary to continue further the familiar picture.

A fuller examination of the facts will reveal what are the realities behind this mythology.

But in view of the prevalence of the familiar myths of the "civilising mission", behind which the realities of imperialism are always and in all countries habitually concealed, it is especially important for English readers, in approaching Indian questions, to be vigilantly on their guard against facile preconceptions or unconscious assumptions of superiority, which are in fact only a mental reflection of a temporary relationship of domination.

Those familiar with the general workings of imperialism are aware that the real driving force which impels the capitalist invaders to subjugate foreign peoples and territories with fire and sword is neither love of the peoples nor abstract missions of civilisation, but very concrete aims of the drive of capitalism for extra profits.

It is true that capitalist world domination, in India as elsewhere, has also in fact in the past, alongside its work of destruction and spoliation, accomplished an objectively revolutionising rôle, in that, by shattering the old economy, building railways and establishing a unified system of exploitation, it has laid the foundations for a new stage.

This accomplishment, however, has been achieved, not only through wholesale destruction and suffering, but under such reactionary conditions as thwart progress and retard the development of the subjected people.

All that has been done in India, in the way of building railways, electric telegraphs, ports and entrepôts, etc., has been done, not to meet the needs of the given stage of development of the people, but to meet the needs of commercial and financial penetration. It has been done on the basis of the most extreme exploitation and impoverishment of the Indian peasantry. In order to maintain its rule, imperialism has allied itself with the most reactionary feudal elements, which but for British protection, would have been long ago swept away, has held the people down in ignorance and has fostered religious and racial rivalries. Hence, the peculiar character of the situation in India, of combining the most archaic forms of feudal exploitation below, with the most advanced finance-capitalist exploitation above, skimming the cream of the spoils, and thus subjecting the Indian masses to double exploitation.

The economic and social needs of the people, the needs of India's own economic development, have been neglected, or even thwarted, for fear of developing the competition of Indian capitalism.

Imperialism has retarded the economic development of India.

Before British rule Indian civilisation ranked relatively high in the world scale. The products of Indian industry were more than a match for European products. It is *since* British rule that India has been reduced to an extreme backward level in the world scale, to a world slum.

For this reason those who try to reach a judgement of the "civilising rôle" of imperialism in India on the basis of such facts as the erection of a tragically scanty supply of hospitals (actually one hospital bed per 3,840 of the population in British India in 1934, as against one per 384 of the population in the Soviet Union in the same year) are like those who try to judge the beneficent rôle of landlordism by the distribution of blankets at Christmas.

A careful examination of the facts will compel the conclusion that, despite all the talk of its "civilising mission" (and despite the sincere endeavours of a few high-minded individual medical officers, missionaries and others), imperialism as a system is the main buttress of reaction in India to-day and the main obstacle to progress, and by the inner laws of its existence cannot function otherwise.

This conclusion may be unwelcome to those who still hope to distinguish between a "beneficent" and a "predatory" imperialism. But the evidence for it will be presented in the following pages.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PLUNDER OF INDIA

"There is no end to the violence and plunder which is called British rule in India."—*Lenin: "Inflammable Material in World Politics", 1908.*

IN ORDER to understand the rôle of imperialism in India it is necessary to cover certain historical ground.

During recent years the real history of British rule in India is beginning to be disinterred from the official wrappings. But it still remains true, as Sir William Hunter, the editor of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, declared in 1897:

"A true history of the Indian people under British rule has still to be pieced together from the archives of a hundred distant record rooms, with a labour almost beyond the powers of any single man, and at an expense almost beyond the reach of any ordinary private fortune."

For our present purposes we are not concerned to follow in any detail the chronicle of British rule in India, which would require

a separate volume for any useful treatment, and the conventional facts of which can be studied in any of the current standard works. We are only concerned to bring out some of the decisive forces of development which underlie the present situation and its problems.

The past is past. The record of British rule in India, when truthfully told, is not an edifying record. It is important that Englishmen should be acquainted with some of the facts of that record (which are normally suppressed from the school-books) in order to free themselves from imperialist prejudice; and it is important that Indians should be acquainted with them in order to equip themselves as uncompromising fighters for Indian freedom.

Three main periods stand out in this history of imperialist rule in India. The first is the period of Merchant Capital, represented by the East India Company, and extending in the general character of its system to the end of the eighteenth century. The second is the period of Industrial Capital, which established a new basis of exploitation of India in the nineteenth century. The third is the modern period of Finance-Capital, developing its distinctive system of the exploitation of India on the remains of the old, and growing up from its first beginnings in the closing years of the nineteenth century to its fuller development in the most recent phase.

The era of the East India Company is conventionally measured from its first Charter in 1600 to its final merging in the Crown in 1858. In fact its main period of domination of India was the second half of the eighteenth century. By the middle of the eighteenth century the Company began to build up its territorial power in India.

The original aim of the East India Company in its trade with India was the typical aim of the monopolist companies of Merchant Capital, to make a profit by securing a monopoly trade in the goods and products of an overseas country. The governing objective was, not the hunt for a market for British manufactures, but the endeavour to secure a supply of the products of India and the East Indies (especially spices, cotton goods and silk goods), which found a ready market in England and Europe, and could thus yield a rich profit on every successful expedition that could return with a supply.

The problem, however, which faced the Company from the outset was that, in order to secure these goods from India by way of trade, it was necessary to offer India something in exchange. England, at the stage of development reached in the early seventeenth century, had nothing of value to offer India in the way of

products comparable in quality or technical standard with Indian products, the only important industry then developed being the manufacture of woollen goods, which were no use for India. Therefore precious metals had to be taken out to buy the goods in India.

Accordingly, at its commencement the East India Company was given a special authorisation to export an annual value of £30,000 in silver, gold and foreign coin. But this was most painful and repugnant to the whole system of Mercantile Capitalism, which regarded the precious metals as the only real wealth a country could possess, and the whole object of trade as to secure a net favourable balance expressed in an influx of precious metals or increase of real wealth.

From the outset the merchant "adventurers" of the East India Company were much concerned to devise a means to solve this problem and secure the goods of India for little or no payment. One of their first devices was to develop a system of roundabout trade, and, in particular, to utilise the plunder from the rest of the colonial system, in Africa and America, to meet the costs in India, where they had not yet the power to plunder directly:

"The English trade with India was really a chase to find something that India would be willing to take, and the silver obtained by the sale of the slaves in the West Indies and Spanish America was all-important in this connection."

(L. C. A. Knowles, "Economic Development of the British Overseas Empire," 1924, p. 74.)

So soon, however, as domination began to be established in India, by the middle of the eighteenth century (especially following the Battle of Plassey in 1757), methods of power could be increasingly used to weight the balance of exchange and secure the maximum goods for the minimum payment. The margin between trade and plunder, from the outset never very sharply drawn (the original "adventurers" often combined trade with piracy), began to grow conspicuously thin. The merchant was now able to throw the sword into the scales to secure a bargain which abandoned all pretence of equality of exchange. By 1762 the Nawab of Bengal was complaining impotently to the Company about the Company's agents:

"They forcibly take away the goods and commodities of the Ryots (peasants), merchants, etc., for a fourth part of their value; and by ways of violence and oppression they oblige the Ryots, etc., to give five rupees for goods which are worth but one rupee."

(Memorandum of the Nawab of Bengal to the English Governor, May, 1762.)

But when the administration of the revenues passed into the hands of the Company, with the granting of the Dewani or civil administration of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765, a new field of limitless direct plunder was opened up in addition to the profits of "trade". Then began a process of wholesale unashamed spoliation which has made the Company's administration during the last third of the eighteenth century a by-word in history. In the words of the House of Commons resolution in 1784:

"The result of the Parliamentary enquiries has been that the East India Company was found totally corrupted and totally perverted from the purposes of its institution, whether political or commercial; that the powers of war and peace given by the Charter had been abused by kindling hostilities in every quarter for the purposes of rapine; that almost all the treaties of peace they have made have only given cause to so many breaches of public faith; that countries once the most flourishing are reduced to a state of impotence, decay and depopulation."

What was the character of the system established by the East India Company when it had won the civil power in Bengal and in the other territories it conquered? The direct calculation of the profit to be made and remitted to England as the sole consideration in taking over the administration was set out by Clive, the main founder of British rule in India, in his letter to the Directors in 1765 with a clearness and simplicity which are in refreshing contrast to subsequent philanthropic humbug:

"Your revenues, by means of this acquisition, will, as near as I can judge, not fall far short for the ensuing year of 250 lakhs of Sicca Rupees, including your former possessions of Burdwam, etc. Hereafter they will at least amount to 20 or 30 lakhs more. Your civil and military expenses in time of peace can never exceed 60 lakhs of Rupees; the Nabob's allowances are already reduced to 42 lakhs, and the tribute to the King (the Great Mogul) at 26; so that there will be remaining a clear gain to the Company of 122 lakhs of Sicca Rupees or £1,650,900 sterling."

(Clive, letter to the Directors of the East India Company, September 30, 1765.)

Here all is as straightforward and business-like as a merchant's ledger. Of the total revenue extracted from the population one-quarter is considered sufficient for the purposes of government; one-quarter is still needed to square the claims of the local potentates (Nabob and Mogul); the remainder, or half the revenue, estimated at £1½ million, is "clear gain". Bottomley's old dream of the "Business Man's Government" is here realised

with a completeness never equalled before or since. Enormous fortunes were made by individual officers of the Company. Clive himself, who started from nothing, returned home with a fortune estimated at a quarter of a million pounds, in addition to his Indian estate bringing in £27,000 a year; he reported that "fortunes of £100,000 have been obtained in two years". A measure closer to the full tribute is revealed by the figures of exports and imports; during the three years 1766-68, according to the report of the Governor, Verelst, exports amounted to £6,311,250, while imports amounted to only £624,375. Thus ten times as much was taken out of the country as was sent into it under the ruling care of this new type of merchant company governing a country.

The dearest dream of the merchants of the East India Company was thus realised: to draw the wealth out of India without having to send wealth in return.

All contemporary witnesses have given evidence of the rapid devastation of the country within a few years by this process: the cutting down of the population by one-third through the consequent famine, and the transformation of one-third of the country into "a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts".

In 1769 the Company's Resident at Murshidabad, Becher, reported to the Company:

"It must give pain to an Englishman to have reason to think that since the accession of the Company to the Dewani the condition of the people of this country has been worse than it was before, and yet I am afraid the fact is undoubted. . . This fine country, which flourished under the most despot and arbitrary Government, is verging towards its ruin while the English have really so great a share in the Administration. . .

"I well remember this country when trade was free and the country in a flourishing state it was then in; with concern I now see its present ruinous condition, which I am convinced is greatly owing to the monopoly that has been made of late years in the Company's name of almost all the manufactures in the country."

By 1770 this "ruinous condition" was succeeded by a famine in Bengal which, in the words of the Company's official report, "exceeds all description. Above one-third of the inhabitants have perished in the once-plentiful province of Purneah, and in other parts the misery is equal." Ten million people were estimated to have perished in this famine. Yet the land revenue was not only rigorously collected without mercy through this famine, but was actually increased.



A decade and a half later William Fullarton, M.P., described the transformation of Bengal after twenty years of the Company's rule:

"In former times the Bengal countries were the granary of nations, and the repository of commerce, wealth and manufacture in the East. . . .

"But such has been the restless energy of our misgovernment that within the short space of twenty years many parts of these countries have been reduced to the appearance of a desert. The fields are no longer cultivated; extensive tracts are already overgrown with thickets; the husbandman is plundered; the manufacturer oppressed; famine has been repeatedly endured; and depopulation has ensued."

(William Fullarton, M.P., "A View of the English Interests in India", 1787.)

"Were we to be driven out of India this day", Burke declared in his rhetorical denunciation, "nothing would remain to tell that it had been possessed, during this inglorious period of our dominion, by anything better than the orangoutang or the tiger". By 1789 rhetoric was echoed by fact when the Governor-General, Lord Cornwallis, reported:

"I may safely assert that one-third of the Company's territory in Hindustan is now a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts."

(Lord Cornwallis, minute of September 18, 1789.)

On the basis of the plunder of India in the second half of the eighteenth century modern England was built up. The spoliation of India was the hidden source of accumulation which played an all-important rôle in helping to make possible the Industrial Revolution in England.

"The influx of the Indian treasure, by adding considerably to the nation's cash capital, not only increased its stock of energy, but added much to its flexibility and the rapidity of its movement. Very soon after Plassey, the Bengal plunder began to arrive in London, and the effect appears to have been instantaneous; for all the authorities agree that the 'industrial revolution', the event which has divided the nineteenth century from all antecedent time, began with the year 1760. Prior to 1760, according to Baines, the machinery used for spinning cotton in Lancashire was almost as simple as in India; while about 1750 the English iron industry was in full decline because of the destruction of the forests for fuel. At that time four-fifths of the iron used in the kingdom came from Sweden.

"Plassey was fought in 1757, and probably nothing has ever

equalled the rapidity of the change which followed. In 1760 the flying shuttle appeared, and coal began to replace wood in smelting. In 1764 Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny, in 1776 Crompton contrived the mule, in 1785 Cartwright patented the power loom, and, chief of all, in 1768 Watt matured the steam engine, the most perfect of all vents of centralising energy. But, though these machines served as outlets for the accelerating movement of the time, they did not cause that acceleration. In themselves inventions are passive, many of the most important having lain dormant for centuries, waiting for a sufficient store of force to have accumulated to set them working. That store must always take the shape of money, and money not hoarded, but in motion. Before the influx of the Indian treasure, and the expansion of credit which followed, no force sufficient for this purpose existed; and had Watt lived fifty years earlier, he and his invention must have perished together. Possibly since the world began, no investment has ever yielded the profit reaped from the Indian plunder, because for nearly fifty years Great Britain stood without a competitor. From 1694 to Plassey (1757) the growth had been relatively slow. Between 1760 and 1815 the growth was very rapid and prodigious."

(Brooks Adams, "The Law of Civilisation and Decay," pp. 259-260.)

The new needs required the creation of a free market in India in place of the previous monopoly. It became necessary to transform India from an exporter of cotton goods to the whole world into an importer of cotton goods. This meant a revolution in the economy of India. It meant at the same time a complete change-over from the whole previous system of the East India Company.

It was obvious that, in the interests of effective exploitation, the wholesale anarchic and destructive methods of spoliation pursued by the East India Company and its servants could not continue without some change. The stupid and reckless rapacity of the Company and its servants was destroying the basis of exploitation, just as in England a few years later the unbounded greed of the Lancashire manufacturers was to devour nine generations of the people in one. And just as the greed of the manufacturers had to be curbed by the action of the State on behalf of the capitalist class as a whole, in the interests of future exploitation (the attack being led by their economic rivals, the landed interests), so in the last quarter of the eighteenth century the central organs of the State had to be invoked to regulate the operations of the Company in India. The attack was led by the

nineteenth century. In the parliamentary enquiry of 1830 it was reported that, while British cotton and silk goods imported into India paid a duty of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent and woollen goods 2 per cent, Indian cotton goods imported into Britain paid 10 per cent, silk goods 20 per cent and woollen goods 30 per cent.

Thus it was not only on the basis of the technical superiority of machine industry, but also with the direct State assistance of one-way free trade (free entry, or virtual free entry, for British goods into India, but tariffs against the entry of Indian manufactures into Britain, and prevention of direct trade between India and European or other foreign countries by the operation of the Navigation Acts) that the predominance of British manufactures was built up in the Indian market and the Indian manufacturing industries were destroyed.

This process was decisively carried through in the first half of the nineteenth century, although its effects continued to operate right through the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century. Alongside the headlong advance of British manufactures went the decline of Indian manufactures.

Between 1814 and 1835 British cotton manufactures exported to India rose from less than 1 million yards to over 51 million yards. In the same period Indian cotton piece-goods imported into Britain fell from one and a quarter million pieces to 305,000 pieces, and by 1844 to 63,000 pieces.

The same process could be traced in respect of silk goods, woollen goods, iron, pottery, glass and paper.

The effects of this wholesale destruction of the Indian manufacturing industries on the economy of the country can be imagined. In England the ruin of the old hand-loom weavers was accompanied by the growth of the new machine industry. But in India the ruin of the millions of artisans and craftsmen was not accompanied by any alternative growth of new forms of industry. The old populous manufacturing towns, Dacca, Murshidabad (which Clive had described in 1757 to be "as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London"), Surat and the like, were in a few years rendered desolate under the "pax britannica" with a completeness which no ravages of the most destructive war or foreign conquest could have accomplished.

It was not only the old manufacturing towns and centres that were laid waste, and their population driven to crowd and overcrowd the villages; it was above all the basis of the old village economy, the union of agriculture and domestic industry, that received its mortal blow. The millions of ruined artisans and craftsmen, spinners, weavers, potters, tanners, smelters, smiths, alike from the towns and from the villages, had no alternative

save to crowd into agriculture. In this way India was forcibly transformed, from being a country of combined agriculture and manufactures, into an agricultural colony of British manufacturing capitalism. It is from this period of British rule, and from the direct effects of British rule, that originates the deadly over-pressure on agriculture in India, which is still blandly described in official literature as if it were a natural phenomenon of the old Indian society, and is diagnosed by the superficial and ignorant as a symptom of "over-population". In fact the increase in the proportion of the population dependent on agriculture has developed under British rule, continuously extending, not only throughout the nineteenth century, but even in the twentieth century.

Already in 1840, at the parliamentary enquiry previously quoted, Montgomery Martin gave warning of the dangerous transformation that was taking place, to turn India into "the agricultural farm of England":

"I do not agree that India is an agricultural country; India is as much a manufacturing country as an agricultural; and he who would seek to reduce her to the position of an agricultural country seeks to lower her in the scale of civilisation. I do not suppose that India is to become the agricultural farm of England; she is a manufacturing country, her manufactures of various descriptions have existed for ages, and have never been able to be competed with by any nation wherever fair play has been given to them. . . . To reduce her now to an agricultural country would be an injustice to India."

But the manufacturing interests were determined to press forward. "I certainly pity the East Indian labourer," declared Mr. Cope, a Macclesfield manufacturer, to the 1840 parliamentary enquiry, "but at the same time I have a greater feeling for my own family than for the East Indian labourer's family; I think it is wrong to sacrifice the comforts of my family for the sake of the East Indian labourer because his condition happens to be worse than mine."

The industrial capitalists had their policy for India clearly defined; to make India the agricultural colony of British capitalism, supplying raw materials and buying manufactured goods.

The indication of the new stage of policy was the decision in 1833 to permit Englishmen to acquire land and set up as planters in India. In that same year slavery had been abolished in the West Indies. The new plantation system, which was nothing but thinly veiled slavery, was immediately developed in India, and it is significant that many of the original planters were slave-drivers

from the West Indies ("Experienced planters were brought from the West Indies. . . . The area attracted a rather rough set of planters, some of whom had been slave drivers in America and carried unfortunate ideas and practices with them": Buchanan, "Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India", pp. 36-7). The horrors that resulted were exposed in the Indigo Commission of 1860. To-day there are more than a million workers tied to the tea, rubber and coffee plantations, or more than the total number of workers in the textile, coal-mining, engineering, iron and steel industries combined.

The export of raw materials leapt up, especially after 1833. Raw cotton exports rose from 9 million pounds weight in 1813 to 32 million in 1833 and 88 million in 1844; sheeps' wool from 3.7 thousand pounds weight in 1833 to 2.7 million in 1844; linseed from 2,100 bushels in 1833 to 237,000 in 1844. (Porter, "Progress of the Nation", 1847, p. 750.)

Between 1849 and 1914 exports of raw cotton rose from £1.7 million in value to £22 million. In weight raw cotton exports rose from 32 million pounds in 1833 to 963 million in 1914, or thirty times over. Jute exports rose from £68,000 in 1849 to £8.6 million in 1914, or 126 times over.

Even more significant was the rising export of food grains from starving India. The export of food grains, principally rice and wheat, rose from £858,000 in 1849 to £3.8 million by 1858, £7.9 million by 1877, £9.3 million by 1901, and £19.3 million in 1914, or an increase twenty-two times over.

Alongside this process went a heavy increase in the number and intensity of famines in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century there were seven famines, with an estimated total of 1½ million deaths from famine. In the second half of the nineteenth century there were thirty famines (six between 1851 and 1875, and twenty-four between 1876 and 1900), with an estimated total, according to official records, of over 20 million deaths. "Stated roughly, famines and scarcities have been four times as numerous during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century as they were one hundred years earlier, and four times more widespread" (W. Digby, "Prosperous British India", 1901). W. S. Lilley, in his "India and its Problems", gives the following approximate figures on the basis of official estimates:

Years.	Famine Deaths.
1800-25 . . . . .	1,000,000
1825-50 . . . . .	400,000
1850-75 . . . . .	5,000,000
1875-1900 . . . . .	15,000,000

In 1878 a Famine Commission was appointed to consider the problem of the growing famines. Its Report, published in 1880, found that "a main cause of the disastrous consequences of Indian famines, and one of the greatest difficulties in the way of providing relief in an effectual shape is to be found in the fact that the great mass of the people directly depend on agriculture, and that there is no other industry from which any considerable part of the population derives its support".

"At the root of much of the poverty of the people of India, and of the risks to which they are exposed in seasons of scarcity, lies the unfortunate circumstance that agriculture forms almost the sole occupation of the mass of the population, and that no remedy for present evils can be complete which does not include the introduction of a diversity of occupations, through which the surplus population may be drawn from agricultural pursuits and led to find the means of subsistence in manufactures or some such employments."

(Indian Famine Commission Report, 1880.)

With these words Industrial Capital passed judgement on its own handiwork in India.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MODERN IMPERIALISM IN INDIA

"Administration and exploitation go hand in hand."—Lord Curzon in 1905.

SINCE THE war of 1914-18, imperialism in India is widely regarded as having entered on a new stage which has little in common with the preceding period.

In the political field the old absolutism is judged to have ended with the Declaration of 1917, which promised the new goal of "the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the Empire"; and the succeeding history is seen as a history of gradual evolution (marred by periods of mass hostility and non-co-operation) through successive constitutional reforms, of which the recent 1935 Constitution is the latest example, towards the ultimate realisation of this aim at some future date.

In the economic field the old *laissez-faire* hostility to Indian industrial development is regarded as having given place to a new angle of vision, which is transforming India into a modern industrialised country under the fostering care of British rule and with the aid of British capital.

A closer examination of the facts of the period since 1918 will show that they are far from bearing out this picture of a progressive imperialism in its declining days.

The distinctive forms of nineteenth-century exploitation of India by industrial capital did not exclude the continuance of the old forms of direct plunder, which were also carried forward and at the same time transformed.

The "tribute", as it was still openly called by official spokesmen up to the middle of the nineteenth century, or direct annual removal of millions of pounds of wealth to England, both under the claim of official "home charges" as well as by private remitting, without return of goods to India (except for the proportionately small amount of governmental stores from England), continued and grew rapidly throughout the nineteenth century alongside the growth of trade. In the twentieth century it grew even more rapidly, alongside a relative decline in trade.

If this increase in the direct tribute from India to England (which leaves out of account the further exploitation through the difference in the price level between Indian exports and imports) since the middle of the nineteenth century is set out in tabular form, it suggests at a glance in very striking fashion the advance in the exploitation of India by England in the modern period, even though it does not yet reveal more than a part of the total process.

#### GROWTH OF TRIBUTE FROM INDIA TO ENGLAND

(In £ million)

	1851.	1901.	1913-14.	1933-34.
Home Charges .	2.5	17.3	19.4	27.5
Excess of Indian Exports .	3.3	11.0	14.2	69.7

Or taking the five-year periods to give a more balanced picture for the trade relations:

#### Annual Average of Five-Year Periods

(In £ million)

	1851-55.	1897-1901.	1909-10 to 1913-14.	1931-32 to 1935-36.
Excess of Indian Exports .	4.3	15.3	22.5	59.2

What is here revealed in this steeply accelerating curve of

exploitation is something more than a quantitative increase; it reflects a change in the quality and methods of exploitation.

The enormous and rapid increase in the tribute from India to England during the second half of the nineteenth century and accelerating increase in the twentieth century conceal in reality the emergence of new forms of exploitation, developing out of the conditions of the period of free-trade nineteenth-century capitalism, but growing into the new twentieth-century stage of the finance-capitalist exploitation of India.

The requirements of nineteenth-century free-trade capitalism compelled new developments of British policy in India.

First, it was necessary to abolish once and for all the Company and replace it by the direct administration of the British Government, representing the British capitalist class as a whole. This was partially realised with the new 1833 Charter, but only finally completed in 1858.

Second, it was necessary to open up India more completely for commercial penetration. This required the building of a network of railroads; the development of roads; the beginnings of attention to irrigation, which had been allowed to fall into complete neglect under British rule; the introduction of the electric telegraph, and the establishment of a uniform postal system; the first limited beginnings of an Anglicised education to secure a supply of clerks and subordinate agents; and the introduction of the European banking system.

All this meant that, after a century of neglect of the most elementary functions of government in Asia in respect of public works, the needs of exploitation now compelled a beginning to be made, although in an extremely one-sided and lop-sided fashion (while thwarting and strangling industrial development), directed only to meet the commercial and strategic needs of foreign penetration, and on extremely onerous financial terms to the people.

But this process of active development, and especially of railway construction, necessitated by the requirements of industrial capital for the commercial penetration of India (as well as for a market for the iron, steel and engineering industries), carried with it an inevitable further consequence, which was to lay the foundations for a new stage—the development of British capital investments in India.

In the normal formula of imperialist expansion this process would be spoken of as the export of capital. But in the case of India, to describe what happened as the export of British capital to India would be too bitter a parody of the reality. The amount of actual export of capital was very small. Only over the seven



years 1856-62 in the whole period up to 1914 was the normal excess of exports replaced by an excess of imports, totalling £22·5 million for the seven years—not a very large contribution for an ultimate total of capital investments estimated at close on £500 million before the war. Over the period as a whole the export of capital from Britain to India was more than counterbalanced many times over by the contrary flow of tribute from India to England, even while the capital was being invested. *Thus the British capital invested in India was in reality first raised in India from the plunder of the Indian people, and then written down as debt from the Indian people to Britain, on which they had thenceforward to pay interest and dividends.*

The nucleus of British capital investments in India was the Public Debt.

In the hands of the British Government the Public Debt doubled in eighteen years from £70 million to £140 million. By 1900 it had reached £221 million. By 1913 it totalled £274 million. By 1936 it totalled £719 million, divided into 458 crores of rupees (£343·5 million) of Indian debt, and £376 million of sterling debt or debt in England. Thus in the three-quarters of a century of British direct rule the debt multiplied more than ten times.

Much of the debt was built up by the system of charging to India every conceivable charge that could be remotely or even fantastically connected with India and British rule in India, even to the extent of debiting India for the costs of a reception to the Sultan of Turkey in London, for the maintenance of the diplomatic and consular establishments of the United Kingdom in China and Persia, for a war on Abyssinia, or for part of the expenses of the Mediterranean fleet.

The development of railway construction with State aid and guarantees for the private companies undertaking them, as well as later with direct State construction, enormously swelled the debt. With the development of railway construction, and also with the development of tea, coffee and rubber plantations and a few minor enterprises, private capitalist investment from Britain in India began to advance rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the same period private British banking began to advance in India after the removal of the restrictions of the Company's monopoly. By 1913 the foreign banks (Presidency Banks and Exchange Banks) held over three-fourths of the total of bank deposits, while the Indian Joint Stock Banks held less than one-fourth.

For 1909-10 Sir George Paish, in a paper read before the Royal

Statistical Society in 1911, estimated the total of British capital investments in India and Ceylon (excluding private capital other than of companies—i.e., capital for which no documentary evidence was readily available) at £365 million. This estimate was admittedly a conservative estimate, leaving certain unknowable elements out of account. Other estimates of British capital investments in India before 1914 placed the total at £450 million (H. E. Howard, in "India and the 'Gold Standard'", in 1911), and at £475 million (the *Economist* of February 20, 1909, in an article on "Our Investments Abroad").

While the basis for the finance-capitalist exploitation of India was thus in general laid before the first world war, its fuller working out was only to be reached in the subsequent period.

The new basis of exploitation of India by British finance-capital was, from the outset, auxiliary to the trading process and not replacing it. Nevertheless, a change in proportions developed of decisive significance for the modern era.

The British nineteenth-century industrial monopoly and domination of the world market began to weaken in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century. In other parts of the world the decline before the new European and American rivals was marked. In India the decline was far slower, because the stranglehold was tenaciously held with the aid of political sovereignty. Even up to the war of 1914 Britain held fast nearly two-thirds of the Indian market against all the rest of the world. Yet also in India the decline slowly but steadily developed from the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. By 1914 the interest and profits on invested capital and direct tribute considerably exceeded the total of trading, manufacturing and shipping profits out of India. *The finance-capitalist exploitation of India had become the dominant character in the twentieth century.*

The war of 1914-18 and the subsequent period enormously accelerated this progress. The British share of the Indian market fell from two-thirds to a little over one-third. Japanese, American and eventually renewed German competition pressed forward, despite tariffs and imperial preference. Indian industrial production made advances, principally in light industry, despite very considerable obstacles, financial difficulties and the deadweight of official discouragement, which was open in the pre-1914 period and continued in more veiled forms in the period following the war.

But while the old basis was thus collapsing, the new basis of profits by finance-capitalist exploitation was steadily rising and extending in volume. By 1929 the total of British capital investments in India was estimated in the *Financial Times* by the former

Secretary of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Sayer, at £573 million on the most conservative basis, and more probably £700 million. The most recent estimate, for 1933, put forward by the British Associated Chambers of Commerce in India, would make the total £1,000 million, represented by £379 million Government Sterling Debt, £500 million for companies registered outside India and operating in India, and the balance for investments in companies registered in India and miscellaneous investments.

This total of £1,000 million would represent no less than one-quarter of the estimated total of £4,000 million of British foreign investments throughout the world. When Sir George Paish made his estimate in 1911, he found that British capital investments in India represented 11 per cent of the total of British capital investments throughout the world. *The advance from one-ninth to one-quarter, from 11 per cent to 25 per cent, is a measure of the increasing importance of India to British finance-capital in the modern period, and a key to recent imperialist policy and the new Constitution, with its special provisions for safeguarding British financial interests in India.*

After allowing the fullest margin of variation for the factors that cannot be exactly calculated, the broad conclusion is evident and inescapable that the exploitation of India in the modern period is far more intensive than in the old. It was estimated that in the three-quarters of a century of British rule up to the taking over by the Crown, the total of tribute withdrawn from India had amounted to £150 million. In the modern period, during the last two decades, it is estimated that the total *annual* tribute from India to England is in the neighbourhood of £135 million to £150 million. This intensified exploitation of India under the conditions of finance-capitalism underlies the present gathering crisis and intensified revolt against imperialism in India.

The view is sometimes put forward that the development of the modern finance-capitalist era of British rule in India, especially since the 1914-18 war, even though leading to intensified exploitation, has at any rate led to advancing industrialisation and economic development in place of the previous decay under the domination of free-trade industrial capitalism. Modern imperialist propaganda, which endeavours to present India as one of the "leading industrial nations" of the world, encourages this view, and professes in principle to adopt a benevolent attitude to industrial development in India.

An examination of the facts will show that this view is far from justified. A measure of industrial development has taken place in India in the modern period, both before the war of 1914 and especially since, but in no sense comparable to other major extra-

European countries in the same period. Such industrial development as has taken place has in fact had to fight its way against intense opposition from British finance-capital alike in the financial and in the political field. It has taken place in a lop-sided fashion, principally in light industry, with very weak development in the decisive heavy industries.

Up to 1914, the opposition of imperialism to industrial development in India was open and unconcealed. Valentine Chirol wrote in 1922 of the official "jealousy towards purely Indian enterprise" which was open until the 1914 war:

"Our record in regard to Indian industrial development has not always been a very creditable one in the past, and it was only under the pressure of war necessities that Government was driven to abandon its former attitude of aloofness if not jealousy towards purely Indian enterprise."

(Sir Valentine Chirol, in the *Observer*, April 2, 1922.)

Similarly the Government annual report of 1921 admitted:

"Some time prior to the war certain attempts to encourage Indian industries by means of pioneer factories and Government subsidies were effectively discouraged from Whitehall."

("Moral and Material Progress of India, 1921", p. 144.)

The discouragement of Indian industrial development was not confined to administrative action or inaction, but was supplemented by positive tariff policy. When the very weak Indian cotton industry began to develop in the eighteen sixties and eighteen seventies, agitation was immediately raised in England for the abolition of the revenue import duties which operated also on cotton goods.

Under these conditions industrial development up to 1914 was extremely slow and slight. By 1914 the number of industrial workers under the Factories Act was only 951,000.

With the first world war a complete reversal of policy was proclaimed by the Government. Industrialisation was officially set out as the aim in the economic field, just as responsible government was declared to be the aim in the political field. The reasons for this proclaimed change of policy arose from the conditions of the war, and may be clearly discerned from the official statements. Three main groups of reasons may be distinguished—(1) military strategic reasons; (2) economic requirements to resist foreign competition in the Indian market; (3) inner political reasons. To maintain control of India during the war and in the disturbed period succeeding the war it was essential to secure the co-operation of the Indian bourgeoisie, and for this purpose it was neces-

sary to make certain concessions and promises of concessions, economic and political, of a character to win their support. "The attitude of the Indian public", as Lord Hardinge was scrupulous to point out, "cannot be left out of account".

The method adopted to carry out the change of policy was the development of a protective tariff system.

At this point the hopes of the Indian industrial capitalists in an assisting forward policy on the part of the Government were raised high. This was the period of the Swaraj Party, or party of Indian progressive capitalism, which defeated the "non-co-operation" policies of the Gandhist leadership at the National Congress in 1923, and dominated the years 1923-26 with its policies, first of entering the Councils for the purpose of conducting the fight from within, and eventually of "honourable co-operation".

But these hopes were to receive heavy blows in the succeeding years.

The granting of protection and subsidies to the iron and steel industry in 1924 represented the high-water mark of Government assistance to industrial development after the war of 1914-18. Thereafter a recession can be increasingly traced.

The elaborate schemes of the Indian Industrial Commission for an Imperial Department of Industries, governing a network of provincial departments in each province, came to nothing. The achievement reached by 1934 was described in the following terms by a competent outside observer:

"Unfortunately, the central organisation has not yet been set up; and, with the constitutional reforms of 1919, the provincial organisation was made, along with education, one of the 'transferred' subjects, and thus put in the hands of local governments responsible to elected legislatures. Unfortunately also, since the funds available have been wholly inadequate, no very important policies could be initiated. Furthermore, the encouragement of industry requires a far-reaching unified government policy concerning not only raw materials and methods of production, but markets as well. In fact, it must be associated with educational policy and almost every other great national interest. It is doubtful whether the mere provincial offices set up in India will have any considerable effect."

(D. W. Buchanan, "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India", 1934, pp. 463-4.)

The tariff system of the early nineteen-twenties, originally proclaimed as a means for assisting Indian industry, was transformed in the succeeding period into a system of imperial preference for

assisting British industry (while giving India in return the privilege of favoured rates for the export of raw materials and semi-manufactured goods—i.e., the attempt to move backwards towards the pre-1914 basis). It is evident that this transformed considerably the significance of the tariff system. Even the reactionary Curzon Government before the war of 1914 had opposed imperial preference for India as involving a net loss for India. It was against the British manufacturer as the biggest monopolist of the Indian market that the Indian industrialist desired protection, no less than against other foreign manufacturers. British capitalism, on the other hand, desired tariffs in India primarily against the invasion of the Indian market by non-British competitors. Hence the conflict of interests. This conflict found direct expression in the Indian Legislative Assembly, when the Trade Agreement of January, 1935, embodying and extending the Ottawa agreements to a still wider system of imperial preference, was defeated by a vote of 66 to 58. The vote was overridden by the British Government, which enforced the Agreement.

The same process may be traced in the wider economic field. By the end of 1936 the *Economist Indian Supplement* reported grimly on the progress of "industrialisation":

"The proportion of the population dependent upon industry as a whole has tended to decline, and in some industries—in particular, the jute and cotton industries—there has in some years been an absolute decline in numbers employed. . . .

"Although India has begun to modernise her industries, it can hardly be said that she is as yet being 'industrialised'."

(*Economist, Indian Supplement*, "A Survey of India To-day", December 12, 1936.)

Undoubtedly a measure of industrial development has taken place, carrying forward a development which had already been proceeding before 1914 in the face of British official opposition. Decisive, however, for industrialisation is not the development of the textile industries—which in any case had won their basis in India before 1914—but the development of heavy industry, of iron, steel and the production of machinery. And it is here that the weakness of India stands out. India remains still wholly dependent on abroad for machinery.

"Engineering and textiles partake of the nature of home industries even though people are massed in power-driven factories. In a cotton factory it is a question of adding loom to loom or spindle to spindle. Engineering in repairing shops is essentially an individual affair. The real change comes in any country when the iron and steel industries begin to be success-

ful. . . . The development of the metallurgical industries means the real industrial revolution. England, Germany and the United States of America all started their iron and steel industries on the modern scale before they started their textile factories."

(L. C. A. Knowles, "Economic Development of the British Overseas Empire", p. 443.)

This necessary order for real industrialisation has been still more powerfully shown in the great socialist industrial revolution in the Soviet Union, which concentrated in the first Five-Year Plan on heavy industry in order then, in the second Five-Year Plan, to carry forward the advance in light industry. India shows the typical inverted economic development of a dependent colonial country.

If we compare the proportions of the population in industry and agriculture before 1914 and to-day, the low level of the industrial development in the intervening period becomes still more apparent. According to the census returns, the numbers dependent on industry actually decreased between 1911 and 1931, while the numbers dependent on agriculture increased. The proportion of the population returned as dependent upon industry fell from 11.2 per cent in 1911 to 10.49 per cent in 1921 and to 10.38 per cent in 1931.

The conclusion is inescapable. The picture of the "industrialisation" of India under imperialist rule is a myth. The overcrowding of agriculture has still further increased in the latest period of imperialist rule.

"Large as are the few industrial centres, factories furnish direct support for a smaller group than was supported by handicraft before the factory appeared. The country is still annually importing far more manufactures than it exports. While the proportions are gradually changing, Indian economic life is still characterised by the export of raw materials and the import of manufactures. In spite of her factories and her low standard of living, India is less nearly self-sufficient in manufactured products than she was a century ago."

(D. H. Buchanan, "Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India", 1934, p. 451.)

The total number of workers under the Factories Act in 1931 was 1.5 million, or less than 1 per cent of the working population; if we add to these the 260,000 miners and the 820,000 railwaymen, the resulting total of 2.6 million industrial workers in modern industry is still only 1½ per cent of the working population.

While in discussion outside India attention has been widely fixed on the lavish talk of industrialisation, on the tariff concessions and on the weakening British hold in the Indian market, there has been less awareness of the real-tightening grip of British finance-capital on Indian economy and its active measures to maintain that grip against Indian advance.

Despite the advance of Indian capital, British capital remains in effectively monopolist domination in banking, commerce, exchange and insurance, in shipping, in the railways, in the tea, coffee and rubber plantations, and in the jute industry (where the now numerically larger Indian capital is under British control). The whole political system works to maintain this domination. In iron and steel Indian capital has been forced to come to terms with British capital. Even in the cotton textile industry, the home of Indian capital, the degree of control of British capital through the "managing agency" system is considerably greater than is generally realised.

Most important, however, for the controlling power of British finance-capital is the rôle of the foreign banking system working in conjunction with the Government's financial and exchange policy. To talk of independent Indian economic development, so long as financial power remains monopolised in British hands, is, and can only be, an empty illusion.

Sir M. Visvesvaraya, Chairman of the Indian Economic Enquiry Committee appointed by the Government in 1925, gave as his considered judgement in 1936:

"One of the chief difficulties in starting industries in India is finance. This arises from the fact that the money power of the country is under the control of the Government, which, as we have seen, does not see eye to eye with Indian leaders in regard to industrial policies. Banks under the control of Indian business men are very few, and many of the larger banks are either under the influence of Government, or are branches of British and foreign banks."

(Sir M. Visvesvaraya, "Planned Economy for India", 1936, pp. 64-5.)

A careful examination of the detailed provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935 will abundantly show that there has been no intention to allow the constitutional reforms to weaken the real grip of British finance-capital on India, but that the whole elaborate network of special reservations and safeguards has been devised to strengthen and confirm that hold.



## THE AGRARIAN CRISIS

"Now awake, brave peasants awake, follow in Krishna's<sup>1</sup> wake.  
 Thieves and robbers have entered our house. Do not sleep.  
 Now awake, brave peasants awake, follow in Krishna's wake.  
 In the month of Baisakh<sup>2</sup> when the peasants reap the crops,  
 The Bohray<sup>3</sup> confiscate the land and landlords rob the crops.  
 There is no peace for a day.  
 They take the fruit of your labour right in front of your eyes,  
 And leave you not a grain to eat.  
 Now awake, brave peasants awake, follow in Krishna's wake."

*Satoki Sharma, landless peasant poet of Muthra District, President of the Village Poets' Conference, Faridabad, May 1938.*

## 1. The Overcrowding of Agriculture

IMPERIALIST RULE, and the entire existing social and political system in India, is built on the most intense exploitation of the Indian peasantry, who constitute three-quarters of the population of India. The understanding of agrarian relations is therefore the essential key to the understanding of Indian problems.

The contrast between the dependence of the overwhelming majority of the population in India on agriculture and the highly industrialised communities of Western Europe is commonly presented as a kind of natural phenomenon, illustrating the backward character of Indian society and the consequent necessity of extreme caution in proposing changes.

Typical is the statement in the classic Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918 in its opening section on "Conditions in India":

"Agriculture is the one great occupation of the people. In normal times a highly industrialised country like England gives 58 persons out of every 100 to industry, and only 8 to agriculture. But India gives out of every hundred 71 to agriculture or pasture. . . . In the whole of India the soil supports 226 out of 315 millions, and 208 millions of them get their living directly by, or depend directly upon, the cultivation of their own or others' fields."

What is invariably omitted from this vulgar imperialist presentation of the picture is the fact that this extreme, exaggerated, disproportionate and wasteful dependence on agriculture as the sole occupation for three-fourths of the people, is not an inherited

<sup>1</sup> Krishna drove Arjun's chariot into the battlefield when Mahabharat was going to be fought. Arjun was diffident to kill his own uncles and relations, but Krishna explained to him the philosophy of war and prepared him for battle.

<sup>2</sup> Month in the Hindu calendar.

<sup>3</sup> Village capitalists.



not represent more than  $\frac{2}{3}$  acre per head of the total Indian population. India therefore feeds and to some extent clothes its population from what  $\frac{2}{3}$  acre per head can produce. There is probably no country in the world where the land is required to do so much."

(Sir Thomas Holderness, "Peoples and Problems of India", 1911, p. 139.)

In 1917 the Bombay Director of Agriculture, Dr. Harold H. Mann, published the results of an enquiry in a typical Poona village. He found that the average holding in 1771 was 40 acres. In 1818 it was 17½ acres. In 1820-40 it had fallen to 14 acres, by 1914-15 it was 7 acres. He found that 81 per cent of the holdings "could not under the most favourable circumstances maintain their owners". And he drew the conclusion:

"It is evident from this that in the last sixty or seventy years the character of the landholdings has changed. In the pre-British days and in the early days of British rule the holdings were usually of a fair size, most frequently more than 9 or 10 acres, while individual holdings of less than 2 acres were hardly known. Now the number of holdings is more than doubled; and 81 per cent of these holdings are under 10 acres in size, while no less than 60 per cent are less than five acres."

(Dr. H. H. Mann, "Land and Labour in a Deccan Village", Vol. I, 1917, p. 46.)

Similar results have been obtained for other provinces.

These are facts whose significance cannot be escaped. They reveal a desperate, chronic and growing land hunger. They point only in one direction, as similar facts in the agrarian history of Russia pointed.

Does this chronic and growing land-hunger mean that we are here faced with an inevitable nature-imposed problem of absolute land shortage in relation to population? On the contrary.

It has been estimated that, even on the existing basis of small-scale technique, the available land area for cultivation in India, given necessary measures of land reclamation and irrigation, could maintain a population of 447 millions, or 70 millions in excess of the existing population (R. Mukerjee, "Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions", 1938, p. 26).

But the extreme poverty of the cultivators, from whom every ounce of surplus and more is extracted, leaving the majority below subsistence level, leaves them completely without resources to accomplish this task. This task can only be accomplished by collective organisation with governmental aid, utilising the surplus resources of the community for this urgently necessary extension

of production. But this responsibility has never been recognised by the Government.

British rule in its earlier period even abandoned into complete neglect the public-works and irrigation system maintained by previous governments. Its extreme exactions have driven land out of cultivation. In the more recent period the beginnings of land reclamation and irrigation works have been fractional in relation to the possibilities and the needs.

The overcrowding of agriculture means that a continuously heavier demand is made on the existing backward agriculture in India to supply a livelihood for an increasingly heavy proportion of a growing population.

On the other hand, the crippling limits of agricultural development under the existing system, owing to the effects of the land monopoly and the paralysing burdens of exploitation placed on the peasantry, make the existing agriculture increasingly incapable of fulfilling this demand.

This is the vicious circle which holds Indian agriculture in its grip and underlies the growing crisis.

## *2. The Land System in India*

When the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India was appointed in 1926, and subsequently reported in 1928 in a bulky Report of close on 800 pages, together with sixteen additional volumes of Evidence, it was instructed by its terms of reference "to make recommendations for the improvement of agriculture and to promote the welfare and prosperity of the rural population". But at the same time it was warned by the same terms of reference that

"it will not be within the scope of the Commission's duties to make recommendations regarding the existing systems of land ownership and tenancy or of assessment of land revenue and irrigation charges".

This is indeed Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. It is impossible to deal with the problem of agriculture in India without dealing with the problem of the land system.

In the traditional land system of India before British rule the land belonged to the peasantry, and the Government received a proportion of the produce. "The soil in India belonged to the tribe or its subdivision—the village community, the clan or the brotherhood settled in the village—and never was considered as the property of the king" (R. Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India", p. 16). The "king's share" or proportion payable to the king was traditionally fixed under the Hindu kings at one-sixth to

one-twelfth of the produce, though this might be raised in times of war to one-fourth.

When the British established their dominion on the ruins of the Mogul Empire, they took over the traditional land basis of revenue; but they transformed its character, and they thereby transformed the land system of India.

At the time when they took over, the ruling régime was in decay and disorder; the exactions from the peasantry were extreme and extortionate; but the village community system and its traditional relationship to the land were still in the main unbroken, and the tribute was still a proportion (normally in kind, optionally in cash) of the year's produce, not a fixed payment on the basis of land-holding irrespective of the fluctuations of production.

The extortionate tribute of a period of disorder appeared as the starting-point and customary level to the new conquerors. The evidence of contemporary writers indicates that the assessments of the new rulers tended initially to show an increase, or that more efficient collection made the weight of exaction in practice heavier.

With reference to the district of Dinagepore in Bengal Dr. Buchanan wrote:

"The natives allege that, although they were often squeezed by the Mogul officers, and on all occasions were treated with the utmost contempt, they preferred suffering these evils to the mode that has been adopted of selling their lands when they fall in arrears, which is a practice they cannot endure. Besides, bribery went a great way on most occasions, and they allege that, bribes included, they did not actually pay one-half of what they do now."

(Dr. Francis Buchanan, "Statistical Survey", Vol. IV, vii, quoted in the Fifth Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 1812.)

Bishop Heber wrote in 1826:

"Neither Native nor European agriculturist, I think, can thrive at the present rate of taxation. Half the gross produce of the soil is demanded by Government." (Bishop Heber, "Memoirs and Correspondence", 1830, Vol. II, p. 413.)

The total land revenue raised by the Company stood at £4.2 million in 1800-1, and had risen (mainly by increase of territories, but also by increased assessments) to £15.3 million in 1857-58, when the Crown took over. Under the Crown the total rose to £17.5 million by 1900-1, and £20 million by 1911-12. In 1936-37 the figure was £23.9 million.

The later figures of land assessment in modern times show a smaller proportion to total produce (the normal basis of calculation

tion being one-half of net produce or rent—Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India", p. 202) than the earlier figures of the first period of British rule and of the period immediately preceding, the extreme violence of which exactions could not be maintained. But by this time other forms of exploitation had come to play a correspondingly greater part, outweighing the rôle of direct government land revenue, through the development of landlordism and enhanced rents, commercial penetration, additional taxation on articles of consumption and rising indebtedness. The simple direct tribute of the earlier period, buttressed mainly on land revenue, has given place to the network of forms of exploitation of modern finance-capital, with its host of subsidiary parasites in Indian economy.

Even so, the level of the assessments for land revenue have shown a continuous tendency also in the modern period to be raised at each revision, with corresponding increased burdens on the peasantry after each revision, leading to movements of revolt.

Even more important than the actual increase in the burden of the assessments in the initial period was the revolution in the land system effected by the British conquest. The first step in this revolution was in the system of assessments and the registration of the ownership of land, in which English economic and legal conceptions were made to replace, or superimposed on, the entirely different conceptions and institutions of the traditional Indian economy. The previous traditional "king's share" was a proportion of the year's produce, fluctuating with the year's production, and surrendered as tribute or tax by the peasant joint owners or self-governing village community to the ruler. This was now replaced by the system of fixed money payments, assessed on land, regularly due in cash irrespective of the year's production, in good or bad harvests, and whether more or less of the land was cultivated or not, and in the overwhelming majority of settlements fixed on individual land-holders, whether directly cultivators or landlords appointed by the State. This payment was commonly spoken of by the early official administrators, and in the early official documents, as "rent", thus revealing that the peasantry had become in fact tenants, whether directly of the State or of the State-appointed landlords, even though at the same time possessing certain proprietary and traditional rights. The introduction of the English landlord system (for which there was no previous equivalent in India, the new class being built up on the basis of the previous tax-farmers), of individual landholding, of mortgage and sale of lands, and of a whole apparatus of English bourgeois legal conceptions alien to Indian economy and administered by an alien bureaucracy which combined in

itself legislative, executive and judicial functions, completed the process. By this transformation the British conquerors' State assumed in practice the ultimate possession of the land, making the peasantry the equivalent of tenants, who could be ejected for failure of payment, or alienating the lands to its own nominees as landlords, who held their titles from the State and could equally be ejected for failure of payment. The previous self-governing village community was robbed of its economic functions, as of its administrative rôle; the great part of the common lands were assigned to individual holders.

*In this way the characteristic process of the colonial system was in fact carried out with ruthless completeness in India—the expropriation of the Indian people from their land, even though this process was partially concealed under an ever-more-complicated maze of legal forms, which after a century and a half has grown into an impenetrable thicket of intermixed systems, tenures, customs and rights. From being owners of the soil, the peasants have become tenants, while simultaneously enjoying the woes of ownership in respect of mortgages and debts, which have now descended on the majority of their holdings; and with the further development of the process, an increasing proportion have in the past century, and especially in the past half-century, become landless labourers or the new class of the agricultural proletariat, now constituting from one-third to one-half of the agricultural population.*

The introduction of the English landlord system in a modified form was the first type of land settlement attempted by the Western conquerors. This was the character of the famous Permanent Land Settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1793 for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and later extended to parts of North Madras. The existing Zemindars, who were in reality tax farmers, or officials appointed by the previous rulers to collect land revenue on commission, were constituted landlords in perpetuity, subject to a permanent fixed payment to the Government, which was calculated at the time at the rate of ten-elevenths of the existing total payments of the cultivators, the remaining one-eleventh being left for the share of the landlord. With the fall in the value of money, and the increase in the amount rack-rented from the peasantry, the Government's share in the spoils, which was permanently fixed at £3 million, became relatively smaller and smaller; while the Zemindars' share became larger and larger. To-day the total rents in Bengal under the Permanent Settlement are estimated at about £12 million, of which one-quarter goes to the Government and three-quarters to the Zemindars.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The method of the Permanent Settlement was not repeated. The subsequent Zemindari settlements were made "temporary"—that is, subject to periodical revision to permit of successive raising of the Government's demand.

Since this has become clear, the Permanent Settlement is to-day universally attacked and condemned, not only by the peasantry and the whole Indian people, except the Zemindars, but also by the imperialists; and there is a strong movement for its revision. The modern apologists of imperialism attempt to offer the explanation that the whole Settlement was an innocent mistake, made through simple ingenuous ignorance of the fact that the Zemindars were not landlords. So Anstey in the standard "Economic Development of India" (p. 98) :

"At first the complicated Indian system was a closed book to the servants of the Company. They began the 'search for the landlord'. . . . It subsequently appeared that in most cases these 'zemindars' had not previously been owners of the land at all. . . . At the time they were mistaken for 'landlords' in the English sense."

This fairy tale is plain nonsense. A consultation of the documents of the time makes abundantly clear that Lord Cornwallis and the statesmen concerned were perfectly conscious that they were creating a new class of landlords, and of their purpose in doing it.

The purpose of the permanent Zemindari settlement was to create a new class of landlords after the English model as the social buttress of English rule. It was recognised that, with the small numbers of English holding down a vast population, it was absolutely necessary to establish a social basis for their power through the creation of a new class whose interests, through receiving a subsidiary share in the spoils (one-eleventh, in the original intention), would be bound up with the maintenance of English rule.

Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1835, in an official speech during his term of office described with exemplary clearness the purpose of the Permanent Settlement as a bulwark against revolution :

"If security was wanting against extensive popular tumult or revolution, I should say that the Permanent Settlement, though a failure in many other respects and in its most important essentials, has this great advantage at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British Dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people."

(Lord William Bentinck, speech on November 8, 1829, reprinted in A. B. Keith, "Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy 1750-1921", Vol. I, p. 215.)

*This alliance of British rule with landlordism in India, created largely by its own act, as its main social basis, continues to-day, and is to-day in-*



*volving British rule in inextricable contradictions which are preparing its downfall along with the downfall of landlordism.*

In the period after the Permanent Settlement an alternative method was attempted in a number of other districts, beginning in Madras. The conception was put forward that the Government should make a direct settlement with the cultivators, not permanent, but temporary or subject to periodical re-assessment, and thus avoid the disadvantages of the Permanent Settlement, securing the entire spoils itself without needing to share them with intermediaries. This was the Ryotwari system, associated in its institution with the name of Sir Thomas Munro in Madras, who saw in it a closer approach to Indian institutions.

The Ryotwari system, although it was advocated as a closer approach to Indian institutions, in point of fact, by its making the settlement with individual cultivators, and by its assessment on the basis of land, not on the proportion of the actual produce, broke right across Indian institutions no less than the Zemindari system. Indeed, the Madras Board of Revenue at the time fought a long and losing battle against it, and urged instead a collective settlement with the village communities, known as a Mauzawari settlement.

To-day the forms of land tenure in British India are traditionally classified under these three main groupings, all deriving from the British Government, and reflecting in fact its claim to be paramount landlord.

First, the Permanent Zemindari settlements, in Bengal, Bihar and parts of North Madras, cover 19 per cent of the area.

Second, the Temporary Zemindari settlements, extending over most of the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, parts of Bengal and Bombay, and the Punjab (either with individual or group owners, as in the case of the so-called Joint Village settlements tried in the Punjab), cover 30 per cent of the area.

Third, the Ryotwari settlements, prevalent in Bombay, in most of Madras, in Berar, Sind, Assam and other parts, cover 51 per cent of the area.

It should not be supposed from this that landlordism prevails only in the 49 per cent of the area of British India covered by the Zemindari settlements. In practice, through the process of subletting, and through the dispossession of the original cultivators by moneylenders and others securing possession of their land, landlordism has spread extensively and at an increasing pace in the Ryotwari areas; the original intention may have been to make the settlements directly with the actual cultivators, but the relations have by now greatly changed.

*This extending chain of landlordism in India, increasing most rapidly in the modern period, is the reflection of the growing dispossession of the*

peasantry and the invasion of moneyed interests, big and small, which seek investment in this direction, having failed to find effective outlets for investment in productive industry.

### 3. Impoverishment of the Peasantry

The consequent picture of agrarian relations in India is thus one of sharp and growing differentiation of classes. The following table, based on the Census figures of 1921 and 1931, indicates the division of classes in Indian agriculture:

	1921.	1931.
	millions.	millions.
Non-cultivating landlords . . .	3.7	4.1
Cultivators (owners or tenants) . . .	74.6	65.5
Agricultural labourers . . .	21.7	33.5

The growth in the numbers of non-cultivating landlords is the reflection of the extending expropriation of the cultivators.

The growth, at the other end of the scale, of the landless agricultural labourers is even more significant. In 1842 Sir Thomas Munro, as Census Commissioner, reported that there were no landless peasants in India (an undoubtedly incorrect picture, but indicating that the numbers were not considered to require statistical measurement). In 1882 the Census estimated 7½ million "landless day labourers" in agriculture. The 1921 Census returned a total of 21 millions, or one-fifth of those engaged in agriculture. The 1931 Census returned a total of 33 millions, or one-third of those engaged in agriculture. Since then it has been estimated that the real present proportion is nearer one-half.

Descending still farther in the scale, if that were possible, we reach the dark realms of serfdom, forced labour and debt slavery, of landless labourers without wages, existing in all parts of India, about which the statistical returns are silent.

"On the lowest rung of the economic ladder in India stand those permanent agricultural labourers who rarely receive cash and whose conditions vary from absolute to mitigated slavery. Such is the custom of the country in many parts of India that the zemindar, malguzar or ordinary cultivator nearly always contrives to get his servant into his debt, thus obtaining a hold over him which extends even to his posterity."

(R. Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India", 1933, pp. 225-9.)

In many parts these agricultural serfs and debt slaves are representatives of the aboriginal races. But the position of the former free peasant, who has lost his land and become virtually enslaved

to his creditor through debt, or who has been reduced to the bondage of share-cropping, is not far removed from legal serfdom.

Akin to these in many respects is the condition of the plantation slaves, or over 1 million labourers on the great tea, coffee and rubber plantations, owned as to 90 per cent by European companies, which pay high dividends. The labour for these is recruited from all over India; the workers with their families live on the estates under the complete control of the companies, without the most elementary civil rights; the labour of men, women and children is exploited at low rates; and, although the penal contracts have been formally abolished in recent years and various regulations introduced since the Whitley Report in 1930, the workers remain effectively tied to their masters for prolonged periods, and even in practice in many cases for life.

The pauperisation of the peasantry is shown in the growth of the proportion of landless labourers to one-third or even one-half of the agricultural population. But in fact the situation of the majority of small cultivators on uneconomic holdings, of sub-let tenants and unprotected tenants, is not far removed from that of the agricultural labourers, and the line of distinction between the two is an extremely shadowy one.

How do this preponderant majority below the lowest minimum standard eke out a living? They cannot do it. Inevitably they fall deeper and deeper into debt; they lose their land; they pass into the army of landless labourers.

"The vast majority of peasants", wrote the Simon Report (Vol. I, p. 16), "live in debt to the moneylender."

What lies behind this heavy increase of indebtedness under British rule, and especially in the modern period? The causes of the indebtedness of the Indian peasantry are economic, and are closely linked up with their exploitation through the burdens of land revenue and rent. A system which establishes fixed revenue assessments in cash, at a uniform figure for thirty-year periods at a time, irrespective of harvests or economic changes, may appear convenient to the revenue collector or to the Government statesmen computing their budget; but to the countryman, who has to pay the uniform figure from a wildly fluctuating income, it spells ruin in bad years, and inevitably drives him into the hands of the moneylender. Tardy suspensions or remission in extreme conditions may strive to mitigate, but cannot prevent this process. "I was perfectly satisfied during my visit to Bombay", writes Vaughan Nash in "The Great Famine", published in 1900, "that the authorities regarded the moneylender as their mainstay for the payment of revenue."

The moneylender and debt are not new phenomena in Indian

society. But the rôle of the moneylender has taken on new proportions and a new significance under capitalist exploitation, and especially in the period of imperialism. Previously, the peasant could only borrow from the moneylender on his personal security, and the trade of the moneylender was hazardous and uncertain; his transactions were in practice subject to the judgement of the village. Under the old laws the creditor could not seize the land of his debtor. All this was changed under British rule. The British legal system, with the right of distraint on the debtor and the transferability of lands, created a happy hunting-ground for the moneylender, and placed behind him all the power of the police and the law, making him an indispensable pivot in the whole system of capitalist exploitation. For the moneylender not only provides the indispensable medium for the collection of land revenue; he commonly combines in his person the rôle of grain merchant with that of usurer; he holds the monopolist position for purchasing the crops at harvest-time; he often advances the seeds and implements; and the peasants, usually unable to check his accounts of what they had paid and what was due to them, fall more and more under his sway; he becomes the despot of the village. As the lands fall into his hands, the process is carried farther: the peasants become labourers or share-croppers completely working for him, paying over to him as combined rent and interest the greater part of what they produce; he becomes more and more the small capitalist of Indian village economy, employing the peasants as his workers. The anger of the peasants may in the first place turn against the moneylender as their visible tyrant and the apparent author of their woes; the sporadic cases of the murder of moneylenders even by the peaceful and long-suffering Indian peasants illustrate this process; but they soon find that behind the moneylender stands the whole power of the British Raj. The moneylender is the indispensable lower cog, at the point of production, of the entire mechanism of finance-capitalist exploitation.

As the ravages of the moneylender extend, attempts are made with increasing urgency by the Government, in the interests of exploitation in general, to check him from killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Volumes of special legislation have been passed for restriction of usurious interest and against the alienation of lands. But the failure of this legislation has had to be admitted (see the section of the Agricultural Commission's Report on "Failure of Legislation", pp. 436-7, with reference to the experience of this legislation intended to check rural indebtedness), and is further testified by the unchecked and even accelerating growth of indebtedness.

The peasant cultivator, if he has not yet fallen into the ranks of the landless proletariat, thus lives to-day under a triple burden. Three devourers of surplus press upon him to extract their shares from the meagre returns he is able to obtain with inadequate instruments from his restricted plot or strips of land, even though those returns are already all too small for the barest subsistence needs of himself and his family.

The claims of the Government for land revenue fall upon all, as also for such indirect taxation as is able to reach his scanty purchases.

The claims of the landlord for rent, additional to the Government land revenue, fall on the majority; since, in addition to the half of the total area of British India under the Zemindari system, at least one-third of the holdings in the Ryotwari area are sub-let.

The claims of the moneylender for interest fall on the overwhelming majority, possibly, if the figures of various authoritative enquirers are indicative, as high as four-fifths.

What proportion of the produce of the peasant is thus taken from him? What is left him for his subsistence? No returns are available on this basic question of Indian agriculture. No attempt has even been made to ascertain the total of rent payments additional to land revenue, still less the volume of interest on debt. Failing exact information, the Central Banking Enquiry Committee Minority Report attempted an estimate in the most general terms (pp. 36-7). This estimate would reach a total, if the incidence of the salt tax is included, in the neighbourhood of 2,000 million rupees a year, or 20 rupees per agriculturist. Against this we have the estimate of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee Majority Report that "the average income of an agriculturist in British India does not work out at a higher figure than about 42 rupees or a little over £3 a year" (p. 39).

A closer picture of the rate of exploitation is available from the detailed "Study of a South Indian Village" by N. S. Subramanian (Congress Political and Economic Studies, No. 2, 1936). In this study of the economics of this village the exact budget is presented of the total income of its population from all sources, the total outgoings and the balance available for consumption. The budget showed that each inhabitant of this village earns an average of 38 rupees or £2 17s. for the year. After the tax-collector, landlord and moneylender have taken their share, he is left with under 13 rupees or 19s. to live on for the year. He is left with one-third; two-thirds are taken.

*"Of the net total income more than two-thirds goes out of the village by way of land revenue and excise taxes, interest charges and rents to non-resident owners."* This is the conclusion reached in this detailed study.

Carlyle described the situation of the French peasantry on the eve of the Great Revolution in a famous passage:

"The widow is gathering nettles for her children's dinner; a perfumed seigneur, delicately lounging in the *Oeil de Boeuf*, has an alchemy whereby he will extract from her the third nettle, and name it Rent and Law."

A more mysterious alchemy has been achieved to-day in British India. One nettle is left for the peasant; two nettles are gathered for the seigneur.

#### 4. *Towards Agrarian Revolution*

On the basis of the foregoing analysis it is possible to summarise the main features of the growth of the agrarian crisis.

The first feature is the overcrowding of agriculture consequent on the colonial position of India. This general situation affects and aggravates all the remaining factors.

The second is the stagnation and deterioration of agriculture, the low yields, the waste of labour, the failure to bring into cultivation the culturable area, the lack of development of the existing cultivated area, and even signs of deterioration of yield, of land passing out of cultivation and of net decrease of the cultivated area.

The third is the increasing land-hunger of the peasantry, the constant diminution in the size of holdings, the spreading of subdivision and fragmentation, and the growth in the proportion of uneconomic holdings until these to-day constitute the majority of holdings.

The fourth is the extension of landlordism, the multiplication of letting and sub-letting, the rapid growth in the numbers of functionless non-cultivating rent-receivers, and the increasing transfer of land into the hands of these non-cultivating owners.

The fifth is the increasing indebtedness of the cultivators still in possession of their holdings, and the astronomic rise of the total of rural debt in the most recent period.

The sixth is the extension of expropriation of the cultivators, consequent on the growth of indebtedness, and the resulting transfer of land to the moneylenders and speculators, the outcome of which is reflected in the growth of landlordism and of the landless proletariat.

The seventh is the consequent ever more rapid growth of the agricultural proletariat, increasing in the single decade 1921-31 from one-fifth to one-third of the total number of cultivators, and since then developing further to becoming probably one-half of the total number of cultivators.

The process of deterioration, expropriation and increasing class differentiation has been carried very much farther, and very much more rapidly, forward during the last few years as a consequence of the world economic crisis, the collapse of agricultural prices and the following depression. By 1934-35 the agricultural returns revealed *an absolute drop in the area of cultivated land by over 5 million acres*. In 1933-34 the net area sown with crops was 233.2 million acres. In 1934-35 it was 226.9 million, or a drop of 5,266,000 acres. The drop in the area under food grains was 5,589,000 acres.

The very slight recovery in prices since 1934 has not been able to mitigate the depression or overcome the still continuing effects of the collapse. "Since 1934", writes Anstey ("Economic Development of India", third edition, 1936), "the sufferings of the people may have become more severe."

The burden of debt was doubled by the halving of the cultivators' income. This inevitably meant an increase of debt, which is now estimated to represent a total double the level of 1931.

In 1921 the total of agricultural debt was estimated at £400 million (see M. L. Darling, "The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt").

In 1931 the Central Banking Enquiry Committee Report estimated the total at Rs. 900 crores or £675 million.

In 1937 the first Report of the Agricultural Credit Department of the Reserve Bank of India estimated the total at Rs. 1,800 or £1,350 million.

From £400 million to £675 million in the ten years 1921-31. From £675 to £1,350 million in the six years 1931-37. These figures of the mounting total of the peasants' debts during this period give a very sharp expression of the deepening agrarian crisis.

The Indian peasantry are thus faced with very urgent problems of existence, to which they must imperatively find their solution.

Can a solution be found within the conditions of the existing régime, within the existing land system and the rule of imperialism based upon it?

It is evident and universally admitted that far-reaching changes are essential, reaching to the whole basis of land tenure and the existing distribution of land, no less than to the technique of agricultural production.

Sooner or later, landlordism must go. In India, as we have seen, landlordism is an artificial creation of foreign rule, seeking to transplant Western institutions, and has no roots in the traditions of the people. In consequence, landlordism is here more completely functionless than in any other country, making no pretence even of fulfilling any necessary rôle of conservation or development of the land, but, on the contrary, intensifying its

misuse and deterioration by short-sighted excessive demands. It is a purely parasitic claim on the peasantry, and most commonly takes the form of absentee landlordism in the case of the bigger estates, with the further burden of additional parasitic intermediaries in the case of the sub-landlords. There is no room for these parasitic claims on the already scant produce of the peasantry. Whatever is produced is required, first, for subsistence, second, for social needs, and third, for the development of agriculture.

The same applies to the moneylender and the mountain of debt. Drastic scaling down and eventual cancellation are inevitable. But this alone would be useless, or only a temporary palliative, unless accompanied by alternative forms of organisation to prevent the causes of indebtedness and replace the rôle of the moneylender. This means, in the first place, the removal of excessive demands on the cultivator and the organisation of economic holdings, and, in the second place, the provision of cheap credit, pending collective organisation which would finally replace the need of credit.

The essential problem is not only a problem of landlordism, but one of a reorganisation of the whole existing land system and distribution of holdings. A redistribution of holdings is long overdue, both to combat the evil of uneconomic holdings and of fragmentation.

Is there any prospect of such a development, or basic tackling, of the agrarian problem taking place under the conditions of imperialism? To ask the question is to answer it. Such a supposition would be admittedly fantastic. Quite apart from any question of the will of those responsible for the administration of imperialist rule, the interests of imperialism, which are bound up, on the one hand, with the maintenance of landlordism and pseudo-feudal institutions as the indispensable social basis of its rule against the masses, and, on the other hand, with the finance-capitalist exploitation of the Indian people as a backward agricultural colony, prevent any tackling of the agrarian problem.

The vast changes now urgently necessary, and admitted on all sides to be necessary, in Indian agriculture—that is, in the basis of the economy and life of India—can only be achieved by the masses of the people of India themselves under the leadership of a Government of their own choice in which they have confidence and which can enlist the free activity and co-operation of the people themselves.

That is why the achievement of the agricultural reorganisation which is now necessary is linked up with the achievement of national liberation and democratic freedom.



# PART THREE

## THE INDIAN NATION

### CHAPTER X

#### IS THERE A PEOPLE OF INDIA?

"The political unity of all India, although never attained perfectly in fact, always was the ideal of the people throughout the centuries. . . .

"India beyond all doubt possesses a deep underlying fundamental unity, far more profound than that produced either by geographical isolation or by political suzerainty. That unity transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners and sect."—*Vincent A. Smith, "The Oxford History of India", 1919, Introduction, pp. ix-x.*

#### 1. *The Unity of India*

AT THE outset we are faced with a "subtle" question, which is still frequently raised by the apologists of imperialism, though it used to be more fashionable a generation ago than it is to-day, when the force of facts and events has largely destroyed its basis.

Is there a people of India? Can the diversified assembly of races and religions, with the barriers and divisions of caste, of language and other differences, and with the widely varying range of social and cultural levels, inhabiting the vast sub-continental expanse of India, be considered a "nation" or ever become a "nation"? Is not this a false transposition of Western conceptions to entirely different conditions? Is not the only unity in India the unity imposed by British rule?

The answer of the older school of imperialists, before the advancing strength of the nationalist movement had sicklied o'er their naïve self-confidence with doubt, used to be very downright.

"There is not and never was an India", was the firm declaration of Sir John Strachey in 1888, in the spirit of the farmer at the zoo stoutly confronting the giraffe.

Sir John Seeley was no less definite in his view:

"The notion that India is a nationality rests upon that vulgar error which political science principally aims at eradicating. India is not a political name, but only a geographical expression like Europe or Africa. It does not mark the territory of a nation and a language, but the territory of many nations and many languages."

(Sir John Seeley, "The Expansion of England", 1883, pp. 254-7.)

"What is honour?" asked Sir John Falstaff, and answered: "A word. What is in that word honour; what is that honour? Air." In the same spirit of profound realism the struggle of the millions of India for freedom from foreign rule is proved by our modern Sir John's a "vulgar error". So also the theorists of the Austrian Empire proved to their own satisfaction that Italy was "a geographical expression".

The argument from diversity, by implication either inferring the denial of Indian nationality, or intended to justify extreme slowness in its recognition, is still widely current. It is still to be found in all its glory in the principal propaganda piece of modern British imperialism about India, the "Survey Volume" of the Simon Report, which was produced in 1930 for wholesale circulation as a supposed information document for the general public on Indian questions. This memorable document of State begins by coolly declaring that "what is called the 'Indian Nationalist Movement' " in reality "directly affects the hopes of a very small fraction of the teeming peoples of India". Thereafter the Report proceeds to endeavour to terrorise the reader with the customary picture of the "immensity and difficulty" of the Indian "problem", the "immensity of area and population", the "complication of language" with no less than "222 vernaculars", the "rigid complication of innumerable castes", the "almost infinite diversity in its religious aspect", the "basic opposition" of Hindus and Moslems, this "variegated assemblage of races and creeds", this "conglomeration of races and religions", this "congeries of heterogeneous masses", and similar polite expressions in abundance.

A citizen of the United States would be undoubtedly astonished if he were to read in a British Blue Book the following impartial survey of the condition of his country:

"The sub-continent of the United States is characterised by the greatest diversity of climate and geographical features, while its inhabitants exhibit a similar diversity of race and religion. The customary talk of the United States as a single entity tends to obscure, to the casual British observer, the variegated assemblage of races and creeds which make up the whole. In the City of New York alone there are to be found nearly a hundred different nationalities, some of which are in such great numbers that New York is at once the largest Italian city, the largest Jewish city and the largest Negro city in the world. The contiguity of such diverse elements has been a fruitful cause of the most bitter communal conflicts. In the Southern States especially, this has led to inter-racial riots and

murders which are only prevented from recurring by the presence of an external impartial power able to enforce law and order. The notoriety of the rival gangs of Chicago gunmen and of the Chinese hongs in New York have diverted attention from the not less pressing problems presented to the Paramount Power by the separate existence of the Mormons in Utah, the Finns in Minnesota, the Mexican immigration up the Mississippi and the Japanese on the West Coast: not to speak of the survival in considerable numbers of the aboriginal inhabitants."<sup>1</sup>

Yet this is the spirit in which the Simon Report approached its task of the survey of the condition of India.

Indeed, it is worth noting that similar profound analyses and "proofs" of the impossibility of unity of the American people were equally current in English expression on the very eve of the American Revolution. Lecky records in his history:

"Great bodies of Dutch, Germans, French, Swedes, Scotch and Irish, scattered among the descendants of the English, contributed to the heterogeneous character of the colonies, and they comprised so many varieties of government, religious belief, commercial interest and social type, that their union appeared to many incredible on the very eve of the Revolution."

(W. E. H. Lecky, "History of England in the Eighteenth Century", Vol. IV, p. 12.)

Burnaby, who travelled in the North American colonies in 1759 and 1760, wrote:

"Fire and water are not more heterogeneous than the different colonies in North America. . . . Such is the difference of character, of manners, of religion, of interest, of the different colonies, that I think, if I am not wholly ignorant of the human mind, were they left to themselves, there would soon be a civil war from one end of the continent to the other."

The democrat will accordingly be on his guard against these *interested* prophecies and presentations of facts on the part of the rulers of an empire on the eve of the victory of a national liberation movement.

Undoubtedly the Indian people has a heavy heritage of burdens, survivals from the past, divisions and inequalities to overcome, as every people has its own inheritance and special problems. One of the strongest reasons for the necessity of self-government is in order that the progressive leaders of the people of

<sup>1</sup> This admirable parody is from the pen of R. Page Arnot, in his article on "The Simon Commission Report" in the *Labour Monthly* of July, 1930, which is worth consulting.

India shall have the opportunity to tackle and solve these problems and carry forward the Indian people along the path of democratic and social advance. For the experience of the past half-century especially has already shown that, in the modern phase of imperialist decay, the offensive against these evils, such as untouchability, caste restrictions, communal divisions, illiteracy and the like, is more and more actively led by the representatives of the Indian national movement, while imperialism has maintained an obstructive rôle against innumerable projects of reform, pressed and demanded by India's representatives, and has worked in such a way as to sustain and even intensify these evils.

The fight against untouchability has been led, not by the British Government, but by Gandhi and the national movement. Indeed, the incident will be recalled when certain famous temples in Southern India which had been traditionally closed to the untouchables were, under the inspiration of Gandhi's crusade, thrown open to them; and police were thereupon dispatched to prevent access of the untouchables, on the grounds that such access would be offensive to the religious sentiments of the population, which it was the sacred duty of the Government to protect.

The British Government has certainly been concerned to organise a separate electoral roll of the untouchables or depressed classes, with guaranteed separate representation, in order to introduce a new element of division and weaken the National Congress. In this way the "Scheduled Castes" have been added to the long list of special electorates.

But for the opinion of the untouchables themselves on this loving care, the evidence of their officially recognised leader, Dr. Ambedkar, who is accepted by the Government as their leader and spokesman, may be taken, as given in his Presidential Address to the All-India Depressed Classes Congress in 1930:

"I am afraid that the British choose to advertise our unfortunate conditions, not with the object of removing them, but only because such a course serves well as an excuse for retarding the political progress of India."

(Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Presidential Address to the All-India Depressed Classes Congress, August, 1930.)

The crippling institutions of caste will only be overcome, not by preaching and denunciation, but by the advance of modern industry and political democracy, as new social ties and common interest replace the old bonds.

"In places like Jamshedpur where work is done under modern conditions, men of all castes and races work side by side in the

mill without any misgivings regarding the caste of their neighbours.”

(Bihar and Orissa Census Report, 1921.)

With regard to the division of languages, and the famous “222 separate languages”, once again the hand of imperialist propaganda is visible in the fantastic exaggeration of this difficulty and in the character of the statistics provided for misleading the innocent. Different estimates can be provided from different authorities, ranging from 16 to 300. This variation already betrays the political interest behind the estimates. The 1901 Census reached a total of 147 languages. If we compare this with the 1921 Census, used by the Simon Report, we reach the interesting result that, whereas the population increased from 292 millions in 1901 to 316 millions in 1921 (without any influx of new foreign populations), the number of languages spoken increased from 147 in 1901 to 222 in 1921 (without the addition of any new or polyglot territory). Truly an amazing capacity of this Indian population to proliferate new languages in scores in a single generation.

A detailed examination, which is only of value for exposing this type of imperialist propaganda, reveals (1) that the number of “languages” of the so-called Indo-Chinese family rose from 92 in 1901 to 145 in 1921; (2) that these “languages” are not spoken in India at all, but in outlying districts in the Himalayas and the Burmo-Chinese frontier; (3) that the vast majority of these are not languages at all, but either very minor dialects or names of tribes; (4) that out of the 103 “languages” included in the group, 17 are spoken by less than 100 persons (in one case the total “number of speakers” of the given “language” is solemnly recorded as one person, in another case as two persons, in another case as four persons!); 39 by less than 1,000; 65 by less than 10,000; 83 by less than 50,000; 97 by less than 200,000. The only language in the group is Burmese.

Yet out of such materials is constructed the imposing total of “222 separate languages” which is trotted out on every imperialist platform, in every newspaper and in every parliamentary debate.

Since then the 1931 Census has reduced the total to 203. It is evident that some of the speakers of the languages spoken by one, two or four persons have unfortunately died in the interval, thus weakening by their thoughtless action the imperialist case against Indian self-government.

The problem of a common language for India is already on the way to solution on the basis of Hindustani (Hindi or Urdu according to the script), the official national language of the Congress, which is already either spoken or understood by the majority of the Indian people. “Hindu preachers and Mahomedan Moulvis”,

notes Gandhi ("Speeches and Writings", p. 398), "deliver their religious discourses throughout India in Hindi and Urdu, and even the illiterate masses follow them." Similarly in the Indian army, where there is no room for nonsense about "222 separate languages", military orders are given in Hindustani. The conception, often spread, of English as the supposed common language or *lingua franca* for India is a myth; after a century of English "education" only 1 per cent of the population can read and write English (3½ millions out of 350 millions). As against this, "Hindustani with its various dialects accounts for over 120 million of people, and is spreading" (J. Nehru, "India and the World", p. 188). The problem of languages in India is in practice a problem of some twelve or thirteen languages. The Census Report of 1921 noted:

"There is no doubt that there is a common element in the main languages of Northern and Central India which renders their speakers without any great conscious change in their speech mutually intelligible to one another, and this common basis already forms an approach to a *lingua franca* over a large part of India."

(Census of India, 1921, Vol. I, Part I, p. 199.)

As in the case of every reactionary rule, and especially of alien rule, the division of the people is the necessary law of the rulers' statecraft.

The total numbers of the British in India, according to the Simon Report, came to 156,000 (registered as Europeans, but mainly British); the 1931 Census showed a total of 168,000. Of these, 60,000 were in the army; 21,000 were in business or private occupations; and 12,000 were in the civilian government services. This makes an effective total of less than 100,000 occupied adults directly representing the imperialist domination over the country, or 1 per 4,000 of the Indian population. It is obvious that, even after every precaution has been taken to disarm the Indian population, and especially to maintain all heavy arms, artillery and air-power in exclusively British hands, such a force could not hope to maintain continuous domination over the 400 millions of India by power alone. A social basis within the Indian population is indispensable.

But such a social basis cannot be found in the progressive elements which are straining against imperialism. It can only be found in the reactionary elements whose interests are opposed to those of the people. We have already seen how British rule has consciously built on the basis of the landlord class, which it has largely brought into existence by its own decrees as an act of State

policy. Along with these are various trading interests and money-lending interests closely allied with the imperialist system of exploitation, and looking to imperialism for protection, as well as the subordinate official strata. But nowhere is this policy more signally demonstrated than in two spheres which have come into special prominence in the recent period, the question of the Indian Princes or so-called "Indian States", and the question of communal divisions, especially in the form of Hindu-Moslem antagonisms.

## 2. *Communal Divisions*

With regard to the communal or religious divisions, which constitute one of the most serious and urgent problems before the Indian people, it will be seen that in fact—in spite of official denials—this division has been undoubtedly fostered under British rule as a conscious act of policy. Indeed, the Simon Report itself was compelled to admit that the Hindu-Moslem antagonism is a special feature of the territories under direct British rule ("the comparative absence of communal strife in the Indian States to-day", p. 29), and has increased under British rule ("in British India a generation ago . . . communal tension as a threat to civil peace was at a minimum").

The question of the relations between the different religious "communities", mainly the Hindus, representing a little under two-thirds of the population, the Moslems, representing nearly one-quarter of the population, and other minor religious groupings, totalling one-tenth of the population, has special features in India, and is a serious issue for the national movement. But it is by no means a type of question peculiar to India.

Under certain conditions the mingling of divers races or religions in a single country can give rise to acute difficulties, sometimes even riots and bloodshed. Orangemen and Catholics in Northern Ireland; Arabs and Jews in Palestine under the Mandate; Slavs and Jews in Tsarist Russia; so-called "Aryans" and Jews in Nazi Germany: these are familiar issues of the twentieth-century world, without needing to go back to earlier examples. Anti-semitism in Europe is to-day the sharpest expression of this type of racial-religious division and antagonism.

Historical experience makes it possible to define very precisely the conditions under which this type of problem arises.

In Tsarist Russia, especially during the later years of the decline and impending fall of Tsarism, pogroms of the Jews blackened the pages of its history and sickened the conscience of the world. These pogroms were widely regarded as uncontrollable outbreaks of the ignorant and savage Russian masses. Only the subsequent

publication of the secret-police records finally proved, what had long been a matter of accusation, and had been sufficiently visible from the peculiar relations of the Government with the "Black Hundreds" or hooligan "patriotic" organisation, that the pogroms were directly inspired, initiated and controlled by the Government. From the day that the Russian people won power over their own country, the pogroms completely ceased. In the Union of Soviet Republics the most diverse races and religions live happily together.

In Germany under the Weimar Republic Germans and Jews lived peacefully together. Under Nazi Germany the pogrom régime has transferred its old base from Tsarist Russia to Central Europe.

There is thus no natural inevitable difficulty from the cohabitation of differing races or religions in one country. The difficulties arise from social-political conditions. They arise, in particular, wherever a reactionary régime is endeavouring to maintain itself against the popular movement.

In India we are confronted with a similar type of problem.

There are in India, according to the preliminary results of the 1941 Census, 255 million Hindus, representing 65.6 per cent of the population, and 94 million Moslems or 23.6 per cent of the population. The difference is mainly religious, not racial, as the majority of Indian Moslems are descended from converted Hindus.

Prior to British rule there is no trace of the type of Hindu-Moslem conflicts associated with British rule, and especially with the latest period of British rule. There were wars between States which might have Hindu or Moslem rulers; but these wars at no time took on the character of a Hindu-Moslem antagonism. Moslem rulers employed Hindus freely in the highest positions, and vice versa.

The survival of this traditional character of pre-British India may still be traced to a certain extent in the Indian States, where the Simon Report had occasion to refer to "the comparative absence of communal strife in the Indian States to-day".

The suggestion that British rule holds the primary responsibility (which is not to say that there are not also other responsibilities) for promoting communal strife in India commonly arouses shocked indignation in official quarters. Yet the facts are inescapable, alike in the testimony of witnesses and in the historical record. The shocked indignation is no argument; for imperialism is far from being Cæsar's wife; and the records of imperialist duplicity are far too abundant for world opinion to be convinced by sanctimonious posing in denial of obvious facts.

In the earlier period the principle of "Divide and Rule" used



to be more openly proclaimed than in the more careful later days. In the early nineteenth century a British officer, writing under the name of "Carnaticus" in the *Asiatic Review* of May, 1821, declared that "*Divide et impera* should be the motto of our Indian administration, whether political, civil or military". Lieutenant-Colonel Coke, Commandant of Moradabad, laid down the principle in the middle of the nineteenth century:

"Our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races, not to endeavour to amalgamate them. *Divide et impera* should be the principle of Indian government."

In 1859 Lord Elphinstone recorded in an official minute:

"*Divide et impera* was the old Roman motto; and it should be ours."

(Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, minute of May 14, 1859.)

In 1888, Sir John Strachey, leading authority on India, wrote:

"The truth plainly is that the existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political position in India."

(Sir John Strachey, "India", 1888, p. 255.)<sup>1</sup>

In 1910 J. Ramsay MacDonald wrote with reference to the foundation of the Moslem League:

"The All-India Moslem League was formed on December 30, 1906. The political successes which have rewarded the efforts of the League . . . have been so signal as to give support to a suspicion that sinister influences have been at work, that the Mohammedan leaders were inspired by certain Anglo-Indian officials, and that these officials pulled wires at Simla and in London and of malice aforethought sowed discord between the Hindu and the Mohammedan communities by showing the Mohammedans special favour."

(J. R. MacDonald, "The Awakening of India", 1910, pp. 283-4.)

Subsequent evidence has become available which has more than confirmed the "suspicion".

In 1926 Lord Olivier, after he had held office as Secretary of

<sup>1</sup> In modern times the same basic outlook is expressed in more subtle form. Thus *The Times* in 1941:

"To emphasise the essential importance of Hindu-Moslem agreement does not imply that the British are pursuing a policy of 'divide and rule'. The divisions exist, and British rule is certain as long as they do."—(*Times*, January 21, 1941).

State for India, and had had access to all the records, wrote in a letter to *The Times*:

"No one with a close acquaintance with Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that on the whole there is a predominant bias in British officialism in India in favour of the Moslem community, partly on the ground of closer sympathy, but more largely as a makeweight against Hindu nationalism."

(Lord Olivier, letter in *The Times*, July 10, 1926.)

The evidence for the official policy is thus based on very authoritative statements of leading official representatives.

It is in the modern period, however, that this general policy has been turned into an administrative system. Parallel with the advance of the national struggle and the successive stages of constitutional reforms has gone the process of promoting communal divisions through the peculiar electoral system adopted in connection with the reforms. This new departure was initiated in 1906—that is, exactly at the time of the first wave of national unrest and advance.

The British Government, in face of the first widespread popular national movement in India, took the responsibility of inaugurating a policy which was indeed destined (in the words of the leading Moslem organ's warning against such a policy a quarter of a century earlier) to "poison the social life of districts and villages and make a hell of India". A Moslem deputation presented themselves to the Viceroy and demanded separate and privileged representation in any electoral system that might be set up. The Viceroy, Lord Minto, immediately announced his acceptance of the demand. It was subsequently revealed by the Moslem leader, Mohamed Ali, in the course of his Presidential Address to the 1923 National Congress, that this Moslem deputation was "a command performance", arranged by the Government. That the scheme originated with the Government authorities was indicated by Lord Morley's letter to Lord Minto at the end of 1906:

"I won't follow you again into our Mahometan dispute. Only I respectfully remind you once more that it was *your* early speech about their extra claims that first started the M. (Moslem) hare."

(Lord Morley, letter to Lord Minto, December 6, 1909: Morley, "Recollections", Vol. II, p. 325.)

In this way the system of communal electorates and representation was inaugurated, striking at the roots of any democratic electoral system. To imagine a parallel it would be necessary to imagine that in Northern Ireland Catholics and Protestants should be placed on separate electoral registers and given separate

representation, so that the members returned should be members, not even with any formal obligation to the electorate as a whole, but members for the Catholics and members for the Protestants. It would be difficult to imagine a device more calculated to promote separatist communal organisation and antagonism. And, indeed, the organisation of the separate Moslem League dates from December, 1906.

The plea has been put forward that such separate electorates and representation were indispensable in order to prevent the Moslems being swamped by the Hindu majority. The falsity of this plea was sufficiently shown in the local government elections in the same period, where these were still conducted on the old basis of joint electorates. Thus in the United Provinces in 1910 the joint electorates, with the Moslems forming but one-seventh part of the population, returned 189 Moslems and 445 Hindus to the District Boards, and 310 Moslems and 562 Hindus to the Municipalities.

The purpose of driving a wedge between the two communities was most sharply shown, not only by the establishment of separate electorates and representation, but by giving specially privileged representation to the Moslems. A most elaborate system of weighting was devised. Thus, to become an elector under the Morley-Minto Reforms, the Moslem had to pay income tax on an income of 3,000 rupees a year, the non-Moslem on an income of 300,000 rupees; or the Moslem graduate was required to have three years' standing, the non-Moslem to have thirty years' standing. The volume of representation showed a similar method of weighting. By this means it was hoped to secure the support of a privileged minority, and to turn the anger of the majority against the privileged minority, instead of against the Government.

This system has been successively extended and elaborated in the subsequent constitutional schemes, and reaches a climax in the present Constitution. In the most modern stage of the 1935 Act separate representation is provided, not only for the Moslems, but for the Sikhs, the Anglo-Indians, the Indian Christians,<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the Indian Christian leaders have strongly protested against the system of separate electorate which has been imposed on them by the Government for its own purposes and not to meet their wishes. Thus the Presidential Address of the All-India Christian Conference in 1938 declared:

"My greatest objection to separate electorates is that it prevents us from coming into close contact with other communities. Under the guidance of our old leaders, some of whom have left us, we as a community have always opposed special electorates which were forced on us against our wishes. The existing system of communal electorates has turned India into a house divided against itself. My predecessors have pointed out year after year to what extent our community has been a loser by the adoption of this system of separate electorates. I think it desirable that we should go on appealing

the Depressed Classes, as well as for Europeans, Landholders, Commerce and Industry, etc.

The effect of this electoral policy, expressing a corresponding policy in the whole administrative field, has been to give the sharpest possible stimulus to communal antagonism. "The coming of the Reforms, and the anticipation of what may follow them, have given new point to Hindu-Moslem competition" (Simon Report, p. 29).

The Moslem League was founded at the end of 1906 under governmental inspiration, as described. The strength of the national movement was such, however, that by 1913 the Moslem League entered into negotiations for unity with the National Congress, and by the end of 1916 this unity was sealed in the Congress-League scheme. During the post-war national wave enthusiastic crowds demonstrated in the streets hailing Hindu-Moslem Unity. The official government report for "India in 1919" was compelled to record the "unprecedented fraternisation between the Hindus and the Moslems . . . extraordinary scenes of fraternisation". This great advance, however, received a check through the collapse of the non-co-operation movement and the Khilafat agitation; the deeper mass unity had not been reflected in the organised leadership, which had come together, but still on a partially communal basis. The Moslem League drifted away again from the Congress and returned to the old separatist tendencies. Favoured and encouraged by the Government, the dominant reactionary leaders of the Moslem League (supplemented in the modern period by a seceding Congress politician, M. A. Jinnah) have played a disruptive rôle, to block any democratic advance and inflame antagonisms against the National Congress.

In opposition to the Moslem League there also developed into a certain prominence the Hindu Mahasabha (first organised on an All-India basis, under the presidency of Lajpat Rai, in 1925), devoted to pressing Hindu claims, and pursuing a similar communal policy.

The national movement has conducted an active and progressive fight against communal separatism and for national unity. The Declaration of Rights of the National Congress represents the most enlightened and consistent democratic affirmation of universal rights of equal citizenship, irrespective of caste, creed or sex, together with provision for full freedom of conscience and

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repeatedly to the leaders of all communities to put forth strenuous and united efforts to remove this blot on the fair name of the country at the very next opportunity."

(Dr. H. C. Mukherjee, President of the All-India Christians Conference, Madras, December 1938.)

protection of cultural rights of minorities. The best progressive Moslems are in the National Congress; and leaders of the type of Maulana Azad, President of the Congress, Dr. Ansari, who has pursued the strongest fight for complete unity, or Abdul Ghaffar Khan of the North-west Frontier Red Shirts, have played a prominent part in the national movement.

The communal issue is grossly misrepresented in the official press, and has given rise to genuine misconceptions on the part of progressive and sympathetic elements in Britain, largely because the impression has been spread that the Moslem League, the organisation of a tiny minority of reactionary upper-class Moslems under the ex-Congress politician, Mr Jinnah, may be regarded as representing the 94 million Moslems of India. The claim is fictitious and has only to be tested by the evidence to be exploded. In the 1937 elections, the only elections so far held under the new franchise, despite the existence of separate Moslem electorates to stimulate Moslem communal consciousness, the Moslem League was only able to obtain 4.6 per cent of the total Moslem votes (total Moslem votes, 7,319,445; Moslem League votes, 321,772). In five of the Provinces the Moslem League was not able to get one representative elected. The North-West Frontier Province, with an overwhelming Moslem majority of the population, rejected all Moslem League candidates, is a Congress stronghold, and had a Congress Government. In Sind, where also Moslems are in a majority, all Moslem League candidates were rejected, and a Congress-Coalition Government was formed.

Of 94 million Moslems in India, 20 per cent are Shias; the Shias have their own organisation, and have also disowned the Moslem League and support the Congress. The Momins, who number about 45 millions, have their All-India Momin Conference, which repudiates the claim of the League to represent the Moslems and cabled in this sense to Mr Churchill in 1942 (a cable which, needless to say, received no publicity in the official British press). Nor can the League lay claim to undivided religious backing; for the Jamiat-ul-Ulema, the recognised most authoritative organisation of Moslem divines in India, supports the Congress. The Congress itself claims a much larger Moslem membership than the entire Moslem League. It is worth noting that the Moslem League publishes no figures of membership; the Congress has a registered dues-paying membership which has reached to over five million.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The phantasies of the B.B.C., in persisting in describing the National Congress, in accordance with the official myth, as the "Hindu" organisation in India (the Hindu organisation is the Hindu Mahasabha), reached comic heights in 1942, when the President of the Congress, the Moslem divine, Maulana Azad, and the Secretary, the socialist agnostic, Jawaharlal Nehru, were repeatedly referred to as "the two Hindu leaders".

At the present date (1942) there are three Moslem Premiers—in Bengal, Sind and Punjab.<sup>1</sup> The Moslem Premiers of Bengal and Sind have repudiated the Moslem League; the Moslem Premier of Punjab, though a member of the League, is in opposition to the policy of Mr Jinnah. The Moslem Premier of Bengal issued a statement in June, 1942, denouncing the Moslem League as “a coterie of politicians . . . the whole atmosphere is un-Islamic and undemocratic . . . the Moslem League has forfeited its claim to be considered such an organisation (representing Moslems). . . . Unity between Moslems and other communities has got to be regarded as a fundamental necessity for the political advancement of India.”

This repudiation of the Moslem League by the majority of Moslem opinion is especially important at the present time, when the Moslem League, since 1940, under the leadership of Mr Jinnah, has declared for the policy of “Pakistan”, or the partition of India into a series of separate independent States, with Moslem States comprising the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab and Sind on one side of India, and Bengal on the other, and with no united Indian Government. This policy for the artificial creation of a whole series of Ulsters in India (in glaring contradiction to the real intermingling of the population in all Provinces, no less than to economic and political necessities) has aroused intense opposition from all Indian national opinion, including from responsible Moslem opinion.

Behind the communal antagonisms, which have been promoted to protect the system of exploitation and imperialist rule, lie social and economic questions. This is obvious in the case of the middle-class communalists competing for positions and jobs. It is no less true where communal difficulties reach the masses. In Bengal and the Punjab the Hindus include the richer landlord, trading and money-lending interests; the Moslems are more often the poorer peasants and debtors. In other cases big Moslem landlords will be found among Hindu peasants. Again and again what is reported as a “communal” struggle or rising conceals a struggle of Moslem peasants against Hindu landlords, Moslem debtors against Hindu money-lenders, or Hindu workers against imported Pathan strike-breakers.

<sup>1</sup> On October 10, 1942, the Moslem Premier of Sind, who in the preceding month had renounced his British decorations as a protest against the British Government's policy in India and against Mr. Churchill's speech of September 10, was removed from office by the British Governor. The official announcement explained that he was dismissed, not because he had forfeited the confidence of the Legislature, but because he “no longer held the confidence of the Governor”.

The solution of the communal question lies along the lines of social and economic advance. In the trade unions and the peasants' unions Hindus and Moslems unite without distinction or difference (and without feeling the need of separate electorates). The common bonds of class solidarity, of common social and economic needs, shatter the artificial barriers of communal, as of caste divisions. Herein lies the positive path of advance to the solution of the communal question.

The attempted artificial division of the single Indian people into two "nations" can never be, and will never be accepted by the national movement. The basic policy of the national movement, as already laid down in the Declaration of Rights adopted by the National Congress in 1931, can only be built on the foundation of equal democratic citizenship, without distinction of caste, creed or sex, with cultural protection for all minorities and with freedom of conscience.

### 3. *The Princes*

Imperialism has divided India into unequal segments—British India and the so-called "Indian States". The fantastic and irrational character of this division, which is far more than an administrative division, and extends deeply into social, economic and political conditions, can only be appreciated by an examination of the map. Pre-nineteenth century Germany was an orderly system by comparison with the anarchic riot of confusion and petty "States" which is the map of India under British rule.

From west to east, from north to south, from the 200 States of Kathiawar or the score of States of Rajputana in the west to Manipur and the score of Khasi chieftainships in the extreme east, from Kashmir and the minute Simla Hill States in the north to Mysore and the Madras States in the south, the limitless miscellany of hundreds of States of every shape and size extend over two-fifths to nearly half of India (45 per cent now that Burma is separated from India), with boundaries which defy the cartographer. There are 563 States with a total area of 712,000 square miles and a population of 81 million (in the 1931 census) or nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) of the Indian population. They range from States like Hyderabad, as large as Italy, with 14 millions of population, to petty States like Lawa, with an area of nineteen square miles, or the Simla Hill States, which are little more than small holdings. The variety of their status and jurisdiction defies any generalised description. There are 108 major States whose rulers are directly included in the Chamber of Princes. There are 127 minor States which indirectly return twelve representatives to the Chamber of Princes. The remaining 328 States are in practice

special forms of landholding, with certain feudal rights, but with very limited jurisdiction. In the more important States a British Resident holds the decisive power; the lesser States are grouped under British Political Agents, who manage bunches of them in different geographical regions.

To call them "States" is really a misnomer; for they are, rather, artificially maintained ghosts or preserved ruins of former States, whose puppet Princes are maintained for political reasons by an entirely different ruling Power. While plenty of petty despotism, tyranny and arbitrary lawlessness is freely allowed, all decisive political power is in British hands.

Why did British rule, which in general sought to replace the motley disarray of India on the eve of the conquest, and has freely boasted of so doing, by a uniform political and administrative system, nevertheless retain and zealously preserve right up to the present day this phantasmagoria of tottering States, whose existence defeats all administrative uniformity, all uniformity of legislation or maintenance of the most elementary minimum standards, or even statistical uniformity?

This policy of assiduous preservation of the Princes as puppets was by no means consistently followed until the modern period. In the first half of the nineteenth century, while the British domination was still vigorous and confidently advancing, a policy of expanding absorption of the decaying States into British territory, under any and every pretext, was actively followed. But the turning-point came with the Revolt of 1857. The Revolt of 1857 was the last attempt of the decaying feudal forces, of the former rulers of the country, to turn back the tide of foreign domination. The progressive forces of the time, of the educated class, representing nascent bourgeoisie, supported British rule against the Revolt. The Revolt was crushed; but the lesson was learned. From this point the feudal forces no longer presented the main potential menace and rival to British rule, but the main barrier against the advance of the awakening masses. The progressive elements, which had formerly been treated with special favour, were now regarded with increasing suspicion as the potential new leadership of the awakening masses. The policy was consciously adopted of building more and more decisively on the feudal elements, on the preservation of the Princes and their States, as the bulwark of British rule.

The Queen's Proclamation of 1858 proclaimed the new policy: "We shall respect the rights, dignity and honour of the Native Princes as our own." The purpose of the policy was frankly described by Lord Canning, the Governor-General who succeeded Dalhousie, in 1860:



"It was long ago said by Sir John Malcolm that if we made all India into Zillahs (or British Districts) it was not in the nature of things that our Empire should last fifty years; but that if we could keep up a number of Native States without political power, but as royal instruments, we should exist in India as long as our naval supremacy was maintained. Of the substantial truth of this opinion I have no doubt; and the recent events have made it more deserving of our attention than ever."

(Lord Canning, April 30, 1860.)

The preservation of the Indian States from the dissolution which would have been sooner or later their fate is thus an instrument of modern British policy, and by no means an expression of the survival of ancient institutions and traditions in India. As Professor Rushbrook Williams, the principal Government propagandist on behalf of the Princes (former Joint Director of the Indian Princes' Special Organisation, Adviser to the Indian States Delegation at the Round Table Conference, and also Director of Public Information of the Government of India up to 1925), declared in 1930:

"The rulers of the Native States are very loyal to their British connection. Many of them owe their very existence to British justice and arms. Many of them would not be in existence today had not British power supported them during the struggles of the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century. Their affection and loyalty are important assets for Britain in the present troubles and in the readjustments which must come. . . .

"The situation of these feudatory States, checkerboarding all India as they do, is a great safeguard. It is like establishing a vast network of friendly fortresses in debatable territory. It would be difficult for a general rebellion against the British to sweep India because of this network of powerful loyal Native States."

(L. F. Rushbrook Williams, in the *Evening Standard*, May 28, 1930.)

What sort of régime is thus maintained by British power? Jawaharlal Nehru describes in his autobiography his feeling of the general atmosphere of an Indian State:

"A sense of oppression comes; it is stifling and difficult to breathe, and below the still or slow-moving waters there is stagnation and putrefaction. One feels hedged, circumscribed, bound down in mind and body. And one sees the utter backwardness and misery of the people, contrasting vividly with the

glaring ostentation of the prince's palace. How much of the wealth of the State flows into that palace for the personal needs and luxuries of the prince, how little goes back to the people in the form of any service. . . .

"A veil of mystery surrounds these States. Newspapers are not encouraged there, and at the most a literary or semi-official weekly might flourish. Outside newspapers are often barred. Literacy is very low, except in some of the Southern States—Travancore, Cochin, etc.—where it is far higher than in British India. The principal news that comes from the States is of a viceregal visit with all its pomp and ceremonial and mutually complimentary speeches, or of an extravagantly celebrated marriage or birthday of the Ruler, or an agrarian rising. Special laws protect the princes from criticism, even in British India, and within the States the mildest criticism is rigorously suppressed. Public meetings are almost unknown, and even meetings for social purposes are often banned."

(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography", p. 531.)

It is doubtful whether there has been any régime in history to parallel that of the Indian puppet Princes under British protection. There are a few of the Indian States which have been administered on levels above the low levels of British India, and which have even carried out partially realised schemes of compulsory education or established very rudimentary forms of restricted advisory representative bodies. But these are exceptions. In the majority the servitude, despotism and oppression exceed description.

The Indian States represent the most backward agrarian economy of a feudal type. In only a few is there any industrial development. Slavery is rampant in many; forced labour, which may be imposed for any of a variety of services, with no remuneration other than food, is the regular rule. Taxes are imposed at will, to grind even the poorest in order to meet the insatiable demands of the palace. There are no civil rights.

The declaration of the States Peoples' Conference (the organ of the popular democratic movement in the States) in 1939 summed up the character of the régime of these Princes:

"In these States, big or small, with very few exceptions, personal, autocratic rule prevails. There is no rule of law and taxation is excessive and unbearable. Civil liberties are crushed. The privy purse of the Rulers is usually not fixed, and even where it is fixed this is not adhered to. On the one hand there is the extravagance and luxury of the Princes, on the other the extreme poverty of the people.

"With the hard-earned money of the poverty-stricken and

miserable people, enjoyment is bought and luxury is flaunted by their Rulers in foreign countries and in India. This system cannot continue. No civilised people can tolerate it. The whole argument of history is against it; the temper of the Indian people cannot submit to it."

(Statement of the Standing Committee of the All-India States Peoples' Conference, June 1939.)

This is the régime which British rule has not only preserved and artificially perpetuated over two-fifths of India, but in the modern period brings increasingly into the forefront and seeks to give added weight and prominence in the affairs of India as a whole. In 1921 the Chamber of Princes was instituted. The rôle of the Princes is the corner-stone of the Federal Constitution projected by the Act of 1935. The Princes are given over two-fifths of the representation in the Upper House, and one-third of the representation in the Lower House. The purpose was very clearly stated by Lord Reading in the parliamentary debates:

"If the Princes come into a Federation of All India . . . there will always be a steadying influence. . . . What is it we have most to fear. There are those who agitate for independence for India, for the right to secede from the Empire altogether. I believe myself that it is an insignificant minority that is in favour, but it is an articulate minority and it has behind it the organisation of the Congress. It becomes important, therefore, that we should get what steadying influence we can against this view. . . . There will be approximately 33 per cent of the Princes who will be members of the Legislature with 40 per cent in the Upper Chamber. There are of course large bodies of Indians who do not take the view of the Congress. So that with that influence in the federated Legislature I am not afraid in the slightest degree of anything that may happen, even if Congress managed to get the largest proportion of votes."

In the most recent period the advance of the national democratic movement is more and more powerfully sweeping past the rotter barriers of the puppet States. The States Peoples' Conference, which organises the popular movement in the States, has rapidly grown in strength. Active struggles for elementary civil rights have developed in a whole series of States.

This advance of the popular movement in the States has also been reflected in the policy of the National Congress. The Hari-pura Session of the National Congress in 1938 declared the general principles of Congress policy in relation to the States:

"The Congress stands for the same political, social and economic freedom in the States as in the rest of India and

considers the States as an integral part of India which cannot be separated. The Purna Swaraj or complete independence which is the objective of Congress is for the whole of India, inclusive of the States, for the integrity and unity of India must be maintained in freedom as it has been maintained in subjection.

"The only kind of federation that can be acceptable to Congress is one in which the States participate as free units enjoying the same measure of democracy and freedom as in the rest of India.

"The Congress therefore stands for full responsible Government and the guarantee of civil liberties in the States and deplors the present backward conditions and utter lack of freedom and the suppression of civil liberties in many of the States."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

"I am sorry to say that if no instructions had been addressed in political crises to the people of this country except to remember to hate violence, to love order and to exercise patience, the liberties of this country would never have been obtained."—*William Ewart Gladstone.*

#### 1. *The Rise of Indian Nationalism*

IN THE modern period the reality of the Indian nation can in practice no longer be denied, although the echoes of the old denial still survive. In consequence, with curious forgetfulness of the previous arguments which up to a generation ago so emphatically denied the Indian claim to national existence and dismissed India as "a geographical expression", the alternative argument is now in general favour to the effect that, if the Indian nation exists and has compelled recognition of its existence, then this must be regarded as the proud achievement of imperialism, which has brought Indian national consciousness into existence and planted the seeds of British democratic ideals in India; and even, by a kind of teleological anachronism, this is regarded as having been the real objective of British rule from the beginning.

"The politically minded portion of the people of India . . . are intellectually our children. They have imbibed ideas which we ourselves have set before them, and we ought to reckon it to their credit. The present intellectual and moral stir in India is no reproach, but rather a tribute to our work."

(Montagu-Chelmsford Report, 1918, p. 115.)

This is the picture which the modern cultured imperialist seeks

to create in utterances for public consumption. The now much rarer public survivals of the old-fashioned type of utterance (such as the famous declaration of Joynson-Hicks that "we did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. I know that it is said at missionary meetings that we have conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We conquered India by the sword, and by the sword we shall hold it. We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods") are to-day regarded in high official quarters as in bad taste and tactically undesirable in an already sufficiently embarrassing situation.

There is no question of the change of tone in official utterance in the modern period. But the sceptical may be pardoned for enquiring whether the change of tone is not the reflection, rather than the cause, of the rising national movement.

What is the measure of truth in this claim?

The democratic evolution of the modern age, which developed in many lands, including England as one of its earliest homes, is not the peculiar patent of England. Nor is it correct that it requires the alien domination of a country in order to implant the seeds of the democratic revolution. The American Declaration of Independence, and still more the great French Revolution, with its gospel of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, far more than the already ageing English parliamentary-monarchical compromise, were the great inspirers of the democratic movement of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 have performed a corresponding rôle as the signal and starting-point of the awakening of the peoples, and especially of the awakening consciousness of the subject peoples of Asia and all the colonial countries to the claim of national freedom.

The notion that India could have had no part in these world currents, or pressed forward to the fight for national and democratic freedom, without the interposition of England, is fatuous self-complacency. On the contrary, the example of China has shown how far more powerfully the national democratic impulse has been able to advance and gain ground where imperialism had not been able to establish any complete previous domination; and this national democratic movement of liberation has had to struggle continuously against the obstacles imposed by imperialist aggression and penetration.

Did the Indian national movement arise because the educated class in India were taught by their masters to read Burke, Mill and Macaulay and to delight in the parliamentary rhetoric of a Gladstone and a Bright? So runs the familiar legend. The legend is too simple, and on a par with the derivation of modern France

from the will of a Napoleon, or the Catholic derivation of Protestantism from the personal idiosyncrasies of Luther. The Indian national movement arose from social conditions, from the conditions of imperialism and its system of exploitation, and from the social and economic forces generated within Indian society under the conditions of that exploitation; the rise of the Indian bourgeoisie and its growing competition against the domination of the British bourgeoisie were inevitable, whatever the system of education; and if the Indian bourgeoisie had been educated only in the Sanscrit Vedas, in monastic seclusion from every other current of thought, they would have assuredly found in the Sanscrit Vedas the inspiring principles and slogans of their struggle.

When Macaulay, on behalf of imperialism, imposed the system of Anglicised education, and defeated the Orientalists, his object was not to create Indian national consciousness, but to destroy it down to the very deepest roots of its being, in much the same spirit as the Tsarist methods of Russification of the conquered nationalities of the old Russian Empire. His object was to train up a stratum of docile executants of the English will, cut off from every line of contact with their people. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than to implant the seeds of democracy. On that question his views were emphatic. It was Macaulay who declared: "We know that India cannot have a free government. But she may have the next best thing—a firm and impartial despotism."

There is no need to minimise the historical significance and achievement, for good and for evil, of British rule in India, or the contribution of that rule, however unwillingly or unconsciously, to the forces which have gone to mould the Indian nation.

The first and most important achievement of the British conquest and exploitation of India was the negative achievement, or *destructive rôle*—the ruthless destruction of the foundations of the old order of society in India. Such a destruction was the necessary precedent to any new advance. It does not necessarily follow from this that such a destruction would have been impossible without the British conquest. On the contrary, there is some reason to judge that the traditional Indian society in decomposition at the moment of the British conquest was trembling on the verge of the first stage of the bourgeois revolution on the basis of its own resources, when the already matured British bourgeois revolution overtook it in the phase of disorder and transition and was able to establish its domination. But in the actual historical record this destruction was the achievement of British rule.

The second achievement, less completely carried out, was the laying of the material basis for the new order by the political unification of the country, the linking up of India with the world

market, the establishment of modern communications, especially the railways and telegraphic system, with the consequent first beginnings of modern industry and training of the necessary accompanying personnel with administrative and scientific qualifications.

These achievements could not in themselves bring either liberation or any improvement in conditions for the mass of the Indian people. They could only lay the material premises for both.

In the earlier period of British rule, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the British rulers—in the midst of, and actually through all the misery and industrial devastation—were performing an actively progressive rôle, were in many spheres actively combating the conservative and feudal forces of Indian society.

After 1857 a transformation took place in British policy and the character of British rule. From this point British policy shifted its centre of gravity increasingly to winning the support of reaction in India against the masses; while its relationship to the new progressive forces, who represented the rising Indian bourgeoisie, passed from the former cordial closeness to coolness and suspicion, and even hostility, mitigated only by attempts here also to form temporary alliances of convenience against the masses. An abrupt end was made of the system of annexation of the Indian States into British India. The path of social reform was no longer actively pursued, but gave place more and more markedly to zealous protection of every reactionary religious survival and custom (the Age of Consent Act of 1891 being almost the solitary exception in this later period).

While the objectively progressive rôle of the preceding phase of British rule in India was thus coming to an end in the later decades of the nineteenth century, new forces were growing up within Indian society. During the second half of the nineteenth century the Indian bourgeoisie was coming to the front. In 1853 the first successful cotton mill was started in Bombay. By 1880 there were 156 mills employing 44,000 workers. By 1900 there were 193 mills employing 161,000 workers. From the outset the new cotton textile industry was financed and controlled mainly by Indians; and it had to make its way against heavy difficulties. At the same time was appearing the new educated middle class, trained in the principles of Western education, developing as lawyers, doctors, teachers and administrators, and advancing to the claims of nineteenth-century democratic conceptions of citizenship. These beginnings, both in the field of capitalist industry and of the new Westernised intelligentsia, were still relatively small. But the new class was appearing which was inevitably to find in the British bourgeoisie its overshadowing







hand. The Government did not found a movement which had no previous existence or basis. The Government stepped in to take charge of a movement which was in any case coming into existence and whose development it foresaw was inevitable.

The official founder of the National Congress was an English administrator, A. O. Hume, who had been in Government service until 1882, when he retired and took up the work of the formation of the Congress. Hume in his official capacity had received possession of the very voluminous secret police reports which revealed the growth of popular discontent and the spreading of underground conspiratorial organisation. The period of the seventies was a period of heavy famines and distress, and the growing unrest had been demonstrated in the Deccan peasant risings. The disastrous famine of 1877 coincided with the costly durbar, at which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India, and with the Second Afghan War. Unrest was met by repression. The freedom of the Press was removed by the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. In the following year the Arms Act left the villagers without even the means of defence against the raids of wild animals. The right of public meeting was cut down. The biographer of Hume writes:

"These ill-starred measures of reaction, combined with Russian methods of police repression, brought India under Lord Lytton within measurable distance of a revolutionary outbreak, and it was only in time that Mr. Hume and his Indian advisers were inspired to intervene."

(Sir William Wedderburn: "Allan Octavian Hume, Father of the Indian National Congress," 1913, p. 101.)

Hume established contact with the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, an experienced politician, in the early part of 1885, to place the situation before him. It was at this interview, in the headquarters of imperialism at Simla, that the plan of the Indian National Congress was hatched. The first President of the Congress, W. C. Bonnerjee, has published his account of this origin:

"It will probably be news to many that the Indian National Congress, as it was originally started and as it has since been carried on, is in reality the work of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, when that nobleman was the Governor-General of India. Mr. A. O. Hume, C.B., had in 1884 conceived the idea that it would be of great advantage to the country if leading politicians could be brought together once a year to discuss social matters and be upon friendly footing with one another. He did not desire that politics should form part of their discussion."

(W. C. Bonnerjee, "Introduction to Indian Politics", 1898.)

Lord Dufferin's aim to build up through the Congress a basis of support for the Government, by separating the "loyalist" elements from the "extremists", was very clearly set out in his speech on the demands of the educated classes in 1886, the year following the foundation of the Congress.

The calculation is perfectly clear. And in the immediate outcome it looked at first as if it would be fully successful. The First Congress was most dutiful to imperialism; its nine resolutions cover only detail administrative reform suggestions; the nearest approach to a national democratic demand was the request for the admission of some elected members to the Legislative Councils.

The twofold character of the National Congress in its origin is very important for all its subsequent history. The double-strand in its rôle and being runs right through its history: on the one hand, the strand of co-operation with imperialism against the "menace" of the mass movement; on the other hand, the strand of leadership of the masses in the national struggle.

### 3. *Three Stages of National Struggle*

The historical development of Indian Nationalism is marked by three great waves of struggle, each at a successively higher level, and each leaving its permanent marks on the movement and opening the way to a new phase. In its earliest phase Indian Nationalism, as we have seen, reflected only the big bourgeoisie—the progressive elements among the landowners, the new industrial bourgeoisie and the well-to-do intellectual elements. The first great wave of unrest which disturbed these placid waters, in the period preceding 1914, reflected the discontent of the urban petty bourgeoisie, but did not yet reach the masses. The rôle of the masses in the national movement, alike of the peasantry and of the new force of the industrial working class, emerged only after the war of 1914–18. Two great waves of mass struggle developed, the first in the years immediately succeeding the war, the second in the years succeeding the world economic crisis.

For twenty years the National Congress developed along the path laid down by its founders. During these twenty years no basic claim for self-government in any form—that is, no basic national claim—was formulated in its resolutions, but only the demand for a greater degree of Indian representation within the British system of rule. The maximum demand was for representative institutions, not yet for self-government.

The Congress of those days was exclusively representative of the upper bourgeoisie, and especially of its ideological representatives, the educated middle class. While it won an enthusiastic and wide response from these circles from the outset, so much so that

measures had to be taken from an early date to restrict the number of delegates, that response was entirely confined to these social elements. The early Indian bourgeoisie of that time understood very well that it was in no position to challenge British rule. On the contrary, it looked to British rule as its ally. For them the main enemy was not British rule as such, but the backwardness of the people, the lack of modern development of the country, the strength of the forces of obscurantism and ignorance, and the administrative shortcomings of the "bureaucratic" system responsible for the situation. In their fight against these evils they looked hopefully for the co-operation of the British rulers.

It should not be assumed that these early Congress leaders were reactionary anti-national servants of alien rule. On the contrary, they represented at that time the most progressive force in Indian society. So long as the nascent working class was still completely without expression or organisation, and the peasants were still the dumb millions, the Indian bourgeoisie was the most progressive and objectively revolutionary force in India. They carried on work for social reform, for enlightenment, for education and modernisation against all that was backward and obscurantist in India. They pressed the demand for industrial and technical economic development.

But their faith and hope in British imperialism as their ally in this work were doomed to disappointment. British imperialism understood very clearly—more clearly than they did themselves—the significance of this progressive rôle, and the inevitable conflict that it would mean with the interests of imperialist rule and exploitation. Therefore from an early period the original patronage of the Congress turned to suspicion and hostility. Within three years of its foundation, the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, its original inspirer, was speaking with contempt for the "microscopic minority" represented by the Congress. In 1900 Lord Curzon wrote in a letter to the Secretary of State: "The Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise" (Ronaldshay, "Life of Lord Curzon", Vol. II, p. 151).

As the failure of the old policy became clear, it was inevitable that a new school should arise, criticising the "Old Guard", and demanding a more positive programme and policy which should represent a definite breaking of the ties with imperialism. This new school, associated especially with the leadership of B. G. Tilak, came to the front already in the last decade of the nineteenth century, but was not able to play a decisive rôle until the situation became ripe in the following decade.

Cut off from any scientific social and political theory, the new

leaders sought to find the secret of the compromising ineffectiveness of the Moderate leaders in their "denationalised" "Westernising" tendencies, and concentrated their attack against these tendencies. Thus they fixed their attack against precisely those tendencies in respect of which the older Moderate leaders were progressive. Against these, they sought to build the national movement on the basis of the still massive forces of social conservatism in India, on the basis of Orthodox Hinduism and the affirmation of the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindu or "Aryan" civilisation to modern "Western" civilisation. They sought to build the national movement, the most advanced movement in India, on the basis of the most antiquated religion and religious superstitions. From this era dates the disastrous combination of political radicalism and social reaction in India, which has had such a maleficent influence on the fortunes of the national movement, and whose traces are still far from overcome.

The starting-point of the opposition leadership, as against the Old Guard, was undoubtedly the desire to make a break with compromising policies of conciliation with imperialism, and to enter on a path of decisive and uncompromising struggle against imperialism. To this extent they represented a force of advance. Their appeal reached to the discontented lower middle class and to the hearts of the literate youth, especially to the poorer students and the new growing army of unemployed or poorly paid intellectuals, whose situation was becoming increasingly desperate in the opening years of the twentieth century, as it became manifest that there was no avenue of advance or fulfilment for them under imperialist conditions, and who were little inclined to be patient with the slow and comfortable doctrines of gradual advance preached by the solidly established upper-class leaders.

In the practical struggle the Orthodox Nationalists, while building on the religious basis for their argument, could derive no weapon or plan of action therefrom save the universal weapon of desperate, but impotent, petty-bourgeois elements divorced from any mass movement—individual terrorism. When by 1905 the situation was ripe for a new stage of struggle, the main weapon which was found was one which was remote from all the previous religious and metaphysical speculations and bore an essentially modern and economic character—the weapon of the economic boycott.

The forces which gathered for a new stage of struggle in 1905 reflected the wave of world advance at that time following the defeat of Tsarism by Japan (the first victory in modern times of an Asiatic over a European Power having its own profound repercussions in India) and the initial victories of the First Russian

Revolution. The immediate issue which precipitated the struggle in India was the Partition of Bengal, then the centre of political advance in India, a plan devised by Lord Curzon and carried out under his successor. Against this Partition, which aroused universal indignation, the boycott of foreign goods was proclaimed on August 7, 1905.

A rapid swing forward of the national movement followed. The 1905 session of the Congress still gave only conditional support to the boycott. But the Calcutta Congress in 1906, strongly under the influence of the Extremists, adopted a complete new programme, sponsored by the old Father of the Congress himself, Dadabhai Naoroji. This programme proclaimed for the first time the aim of Swaraj or Self-Government, defined as colonial self-government within the Empire ("the system of government obtaining in the self-governing British colonies"), support of the boycott movement, support of "Swadeshi" or the promotion of indigenous industries, and National Education. Swaraj, Boycott, Swadeshi and National Education became now the four cardinal points of the Congress programme.

The hand of Government repression rapidly followed the new awakening of the movement. In 1907 was passed the Seditious Meetings Act, and a new and drastic Press Act followed in 1910 (the previous Press Act of 1878 had been repealed under the liberal administration of Lord Ripon in 1882). On the basis of a regulation of 1818 the method of deportation without trial was brought into play against the Extremist leaders. All this took place under the "liberal" Lord Morley as Secretary for India. In 1908 Tilak, the man whom the Government most feared, was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for an article published in his newspaper, and was held in prison in Mandalay until the month before the outbreak of the war. The arrest of Tilak led to a general strike of the Bombay textile workers—the first political action of the Indian proletariat. Most of the other prominent leaders were either sentenced or deported, or passed into exile to escape sentence. Between 1906 and 1909 there were 550 political cases before the courts in Bengal alone. Police action was carried out with great rigour; meetings were broken up; agrarian riots were ruthlessly suppressed in the Punjab; school-children were arrested for singing national songs.

As in the previous period, repression was followed and accompanied by concessions to "rally the Moderates". The very limited Morley-Minto Reforms in 1909 gave a grudging extension to the system of representation initiated in the Indian Councils Act of 1892, by permitting a minority of indirectly elected members in the Central Legislative Council, and a majority of

indirectly elected members in the Provincial Councils; the Councils were advisory bodies and had no effective powers. The Moderate leaders, now in sole control of the Congress, seized the occasion of these Reforms to proclaim their unity with the Government.

The revision of the Partition of Bengal in 1911 represented a partial victory of the boycott movement. The wave of struggle which had developed during the years 1906-11 did not maintain its strength during the immediately succeeding years; but the permanent advance which had been achieved in the stature of the national movement was never lost. The Indian claim to freedom had for the first time during those years been brought to the forefront of world political questions; and the seed of the aim of complete national liberation, and of determined struggle to achieve it, had been implanted in the political movement, and was destined in the subsequent years to strike root in the masses of the people.

It was the shock of the first world war, with its lasting blow to the whole structure of imperialism, and the opening of the world revolutionary wave that followed in 1917 and after, which released the first mass movement of revolt in India.

Just as the awakening of 1905 reflected the world movement, even more so was this the case with the great mass movement which shook the foundations of British rule in India in the years succeeding 1917.

The war of 1914, following the lesson of the defeat of Russian Tsarism by Japan a decade earlier, completed the shattering of the myth of the invincibility of Western imperialism in the eyes of the Asiatic peoples. The spectacle of the suicidal conflict of the imperialist Powers aroused hopes in the breasts of millions of the subject peoples that the hour of collapse of the existing Empires was at hand.

The British Government took firm measures from the outset to hold the situation in hand, by the adoption of special legislation and powers, notably the Defence of India Act, and by the imprisonment or internment of the most irreconcilable fighters or members of the revolutionary groups. In this task it was assisted in the earlier period of the war by the willing co-operation of the upper sections of the political movement. The Congress, under control of the Moderate leaders, proclaimed its loyalty and support of the war in resolutions adopted at each of its four annual sessions during the war, and even at the Delhi session in 1918 at the close of the war passed a resolution of loyalty to the King and congratulations on "the successful termination of the war".

These demonstrations of "loyalty" by the Moderate leaders

were regarded by British official opinion as an expression of gratitude and enthusiasm for the blessings of British rule. In fact, however, the calculation of these leaders, as they themselves subsequently explained, had been by these services to imperialism at war to open the door most rapidly to Indian self-government. Thus Gandhi declared, in his speech at his trial in 1922:

"In all these efforts at service I was actuated by the belief that it was possible by such services to gain a status of full equality for my countrymen."

They were later to express their disillusionment.

The docility of the upper political leadership did not prevent the growth of mass unrest from the conditions of the war. The very heavy burdens of crippling financial contributions exacted from the poverty-stricken people of India for the service of the war, the rising prices and the reckless profiteering created conditions of mass misery and impoverishment, which were reflected in the unparalleled toll of the influenza epidemic at the end of the war, killing 14 millions. The growth of unrest was reflected in the Ghadr movement in the Punjab, and in mutinies in the army, which were suppressed with ruthless executions and sentences.

The growing unrest began to find a reflection in the political movement, in which new stirrings appeared from 1916 onwards. In 1916 Tilak founded the Home Rule for India League. His campaign was joined by the English theosophist, Mrs. Besant, who sought to guide the national movement in channels of "loyalty" to the Empire and was later to take an active part in the fight against non-co-operation. Reunion between the Extremists and Moderates was achieved at the Lucknow Congress in 1916. Even more important, the plans for alliance between the Congress and the Moslem League, which had been originally prepared at the Karachi Congress in 1913, reached fruition in 1916. In 1916 the Lucknow Pact of the two bodies reached agreement on a common scheme for reforms in the direction of partial self-government within the Empire (elected majorities in the Councils, extended powers of the Councils, half the Viceroy's Executive to be Indians), which became known as the Congress-League scheme. At the same time the aim was proclaimed of India becoming "an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions".

This was the position when the rapid transformation of the world situation in 1917, following the Russian Revolution, affected the whole tempo of events and found its speedy reflection in the relations of Britain and India. Within five months of the fall of Tsarism the British Government hastened to issue a declaration



(known as the Montagu declaration) which proclaimed the aims of British rule in India to be "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire", and promising "substantial steps in this direction as soon as possible". But the reforms were not enacted until the end of 1919 and only came into operation in 1920. By that time the whole situation in India had changed.

The Reforms were partially successful, as with the Morley-Minto scheme a decade earlier, in creating a division in the upper-class national camp; but the support of the Moderates thus secured was of far less weight in the political situation at this more advanced stage of development.

For in fact, despite the still-continuing co-operation of the Congress, the whole situation in India had changed in 1919, and the basis for co-operation was disappearing from under the feet of the Congress. The year 1919 saw a wave of mass unrest spread over India. Already the closing months of 1918 and the first months of 1919 saw the opening of a strike movement on a scale never before known in India. In December, 1918, the Bombay mill strike began, which by January, 1919, extended to 125,000 workers. The Rowlatt Acts, introduced in the beginning of 1919 and enacted in March, with the purpose to continue after the lapse of war-time legislation the extraordinary repressive powers of the Government, for dispensing with ordinary court procedure, and for imprisonment without trial, aroused widespread indignation as demonstrating the iron hand of imperialism beneath the velvet glove of Reform. Gandhi, utilising his South African experience, sought to organise a passive resistance movement against the Rowlatt Bills, and formed a Satyagraha League for this purpose in February. A hartal, or general day of suspension of business, was called for April 6. The response of the masses startled and overwhelmed the initiators of the movement. Through March and April a mighty wave of mass demonstrations, strikes, unrest, in some cases rioting, and courageous resistance to violent repression in the face of heavy casualties, spread over many parts of India. The official Government Report for the year speaks with alarmed amazement of the new-found unity of the people and the breakdown of all the official conceptions of Hindu-Moslem antagonism:

"One noticeable feature of the general excitement was the unprecedented fraternisation between the Hindus and the Moslems. Their union, between the leaders, had now for long been a fixed plan of the nationalist platform. In this time of

public excitement even the lower classes agreed for once to forget their differences. Extraordinary scenes of fraternisation occurred. Hindus publicly accepted water from the hands of Moslems and vice versa. Hindu-Moslem Unity was the watch-word of processions indicated both by cries and by banners. Hindu leaders had actually been allowed to preach from the pulpit of a Mosque."

("India in 1919.")

Extraordinary measures of repression followed. It was at this time that the atrocity of Amritsar occurred, when General Dyer fired 1,600 rounds of ammunition into an unarmed crowd in an enclosed place without means of exit, killing (according to the official figures) 379, and leaving 1,200 wounded without means of attention, the object being, according to his subsequent statement, to create "a moral effect from a military point of view, not only on those who were present, but more especially throughout the Punjab"—i.e., to terrorise the population. For nearly eight months all news of it was officially suppressed and withheld from parliament and the British public. For diplomatic reasons, in face of agitation and a Congress enquiry, a committee had to be set up by the Government to enquire into and condemn this outrage; but General Dyer received the plaudits (and a purse of £20,000) from the imperialists for his brave stand, and his action was officially approved by the House of Lords. Martial law was proclaimed in the Punjab; and the record of the wholesale shootings, hangings, bombings from the air, and extraordinary sentences perpetrated by the tribunals during this reign of terror, is still only available in fragmentary form from the subsequent enquiries.

Gandhi took alarm at the situation which was developing. In view of sporadic cases of violence of the masses against their rulers which had appeared in Calcutta, Bombay, Ahmedabad and elsewhere, he declared that he had committed "a blunder of Himalayan dimensions which had enabled ill-disposed persons, not true passive resisters at all, to perpetrate disorders". Accordingly, he suspended passive resistance in the middle of April, within a week of the hartal, and thus called off the movement at the moment it was beginning to reach its height, on the grounds, as he subsequently explained in a letter to the Press on July 21, that "a civil resister never seeks to embarrass the Government".

The tide of rising mass unrest was still advancing in 1920 and 1921, and was to be further intensified by the economic crisis which began to develop in the latter part of 1920. The first six months of 1920 saw the greatest height of the strike movement, with no less than 200 strikes involving one and a half million workers.

It was in this situation that in 1920 Gandhi and the main body of the Congress leadership (now deserted by the former Moderates) executed a decisive change of front, threw over co-operation with the Reforms, determined to take the leadership of the rising mass movement, and for this purpose evolved the plan of "non-violent non-co-operation". Henceforward the mass struggle was to be led by the Congress; but the price of that leadership was to be that the struggle must be "non-violent".

The new plan of non-violent non-co-operation was adopted at the Calcutta Special Congress in September, 1920. The resolution proclaimed the policy of "progressive non-violent non-co-operation inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi, until the said wrongs are righted and Swaraj is established". The policy envisaged successive stages, beginning with the renunciation of titles bestowed by the Government, and the triple boycott (boycott of the legislatures, lawcourts and educational institutions), together with "reviving hand-spinning in every house and hand-weaving"; and leading up at some future date to the final stage of non-payment of taxes. It will be seen that the immediate measures were measures of boycott to be adopted by the middle-class elements, officials, lawyers and students, with the only rôle for the masses the constructive task of "hand-spinning and hand-weaving"; the active participation of the masses, through non-payment of taxes (which inevitably meant a No-Rent campaign) was reserved for later.

The boycott of the elections to the new legislatures, which took place in November, was markedly successful, two-thirds of the electors abstaining. The boycott of educational institutions had a considerable measure of success, masses of students sweeping with enthusiasm into the non-co-operation movement. The lawyers' boycott was less successful, except for a few outstanding examples, such as those of Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das.

At the annual session of the Congress at Nagpur in December, 1920, the new programme was finally adopted with practical unanimity. The Creed of the Congress was changed from the previous proclamation of the aim of colonial self-government within the Empire, to be attained by constitutional means, to the new aim of "the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means". The organisation of the Congress was carried forward from its previous loose character to the machinery of a modern party, with its units reaching down to the villages and localities, and with a standing Executive ("Working Committee") of fifteen.

The new programme and policy inaugurated by Gandhi marked a giant's advance for the National Congress. The Congress now stood out as a political party leading the masses in

struggle against the Government for the realisation of national freedom. From this point the National Congress won its position as the central focus of the united national movement, a position which, through good and evil repute, through whatever changes of tactics and fortunes, it has maintained and carried forward up to this day.

A great sweep forward of the mass movement followed the adoption by the Congress of the new militant programme of struggle against the Government for the speedy realisation of Swaraj. Gandhi freely declared as a firm and certain prophecy (which, despite its naïve character, was confidently believed by his followers in the flush of enthusiasm of those days) the rash promise that Swaraj would be achieved within twelve months, that is—for the date was definite—by December 31, 1921.

The advance of the movement in 1921 was demonstrated, not only in the enthusiastic development of the non-co-operation movement, but in the accompanying rising forms of mass struggle in all parts of the country, as in the Assam-Bengal railway strike, the Midnapore No-Tax campaign, the Moplah rebellion in Malabar in the South, and the militant Akali movement against the Government-defended rich Mohants in the Punjab.

Towards the closing months of 1921 the struggle leapt to new heights. The Government, in deep alarm and anxiety over the whole situation, played their hoped-for Ace of Trumps against Gandhi by bringing in—not merely the Duke of Connaught, as earlier in the year—but the Prince of Wales himself to tour India. The hartal all over India which greeted the Prince of Wales on his arrival on November 17 was the most overwhelming and successful demonstration of popular disaffection which India had yet known. The hostility of the people and the angry repression by the Government led to sanguinary struggles, which Gandhi sought vainly to check and which led him to declare that Swaraj stank in his nostrils.

From this point the National Volunteer movement began to consolidate its ranks. They were still organised within the framework of the Congress or of the Khilafat movement on the basis of "non-violent non-co-operation"; but many wore uniform, drilled and marched in mass formation to organise hartals and the boycott of foreign cloth by picketing and peaceful persuasion.

The full force of Government repression was turned against the National Volunteers. The Governmental Press, such as the *Statesman* and the *Englishman*, complained that the National Volunteers had taken possession of Calcutta and that the Government had abdicated, and demanded immediate action. The Government proclaimed the Volunteers illegal organisations.

Arrests spread in thousands. Thousands of students and factory workers replenished the ranks of the Volunteers.

By the end of December all the best-known Congress leaders, except Gandhi, were imprisoned. Twenty thousand political prisoners filled the jails. At the highest point of the struggle, at the beginning of the following year, 30,000 were in jail. Enthusiasm was at fever heat.

The Government was anxious and perplexed, and began to lose its nerve. If the infection of universal defiance of the Government spread from the towns and began to reach the millions of the peasantry, there was no salvation left for British rule; all their guns and aeroplanes would not avail them in the seething cauldron of rebellion of 300 millions. The Viceroy proceeded, through the intermediary of Pandit Malaviya, to negotiate with the political leaders in jail. He offered legalisation of the National Volunteers and release of the prisoners in return for the calling off of civil disobedience. The negotiations proved abortive.

In this situation the Ahmedabad Congress was held at the close of the year 1921. Amid enthusiasm the Congress passed resolutions proclaiming "the fixed determination of the Congress to continue the campaign of non-violent non-co-operation with greater vigour . . . till Swaraj is established and the control of the Government of India passes into the hands of the people", calling on all over eighteen years of age to join the illegal National Volunteers, pledging the aim "to concentrate attention upon Civil Disobedience, whether mass or individual, whether of an offensive or defensive character", and placing full dictatorial powers for this purpose in the hands of "Mahatma Gandhi as the sole Executive authority of the Congress".

Gandhi was now Dictator of the Congress. The movement was at its highest point. Full powers had been placed in his hands to lead it to victory. The moment had come for the final trial of strength, for the launching of mass civil disobedience. The whole country was looking to Gandhi. What would he do?

Gandhi's action was peculiar. He waited a month. During this month districts approached him, pleading to begin a No-Tax campaign. The news of the growth of unrest among the peasantry immediately determined Gandhi that there was no time to be lost. At a hasty meeting of the Working Committee at Bardoli on February 12, the decision was reached, in view of the "inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura" (where angry peasants stormed and burned a village police station, resulting in the death of twenty-two police officers) to end mass civil disobedience and to substitute a constructive programme of spinning, temperance reform and educational activities. The battle was over. Motilal

Nehru, Lajpat Rai and others sent from prison long and indignant letters to Gandhi protesting at his decision. Gandhi coldly replied that men in prison were "civilly dead" and had no claim to any say in policy.

The Bardoli resolution of February, 1922, suspending mass civil disobedience in the name of "non-violence", threw an instructive light on the real meaning of "non-violence". Of its seven clauses no less than three dealt with the necessity of the payment of rent by the peasants to the landlords or Government (though non-payment of rent could hardly be suggested by any one to be a "violent" action):

"Clause 6: The Working Committee advises Congress workers and organisations to inform the ryots (peasants) that withholding of rent payment to the Zemindars (landlords) is contrary to the Congress resolutions and injurious to the best interests of the country.

"Clause 7: The Working Committee assures the Zemindars that the Congress movement is in no way intended to attack their legal rights."

After the movement had been thus paralysed and demoralised from within, the Government struck with confidence. On March 10 Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Not a ripple followed in the mass movement. Within less than two years Gandhi was released. The crisis was over.

For half a decade after the blow of Bardoli the national movement was prostrated. The Congress fell to a low ebb. By 1924 Gandhi was declaring that, in place of the proclaimed aim of 10 million members, they could not claim more than 200,000: "We politicians do not represent the masses except in opposition to the Government." In this depression of the national movement the sinister symptom of communal disorders was able to spread over the land. The Moslem League separated itself again from the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha conducted a narrow and reactionary counter-propaganda.

A section of the leadership of the Congress, represented by C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru, sought after Bardoli to make a decisive turn away from what they regarded as the sterile and unpractical policies of Gandhi by forming a new party, while remaining within the Congress, to contest the elections and carry forward the fight on the parliamentary plane within the new legislatures. This new party was named the Swaraj Party.

The decision to end the boycott of the elections and of the legislatures was undoubtedly, in view of the weakness of the mass movement, a step in advance. It was opposed by the impotent

and conservative "No-Changers" in the Congress, who clung to Gandhi's "constructive programme" of spinning, temperance, removal of untouchability and similar social reforms as the only path of salvation; but they were powerless to prevent sanctioning of its adoption by that section of the Congress which desired a more positive policy. By 1925 the Congress made its complete and unconditional surrender to the Swaraj Party, which held the majority and whose leaders took over decisive control, while Gandhi passed for the time being into the background.

The Swaraj Party leaders, however, in seeking to turn away from the policies of Gandhi which had landed the movement in an *impasse*, also turned away still farther from any basis in the masses. The Swaraj Party was the party of the progressive upper bourgeoisie; its existence depended on the support of these elements, just as its main leaders came from among them. In practice, therefore, the Swaraj Party, though intended to represent a step in advance, was no more than the reflection of the ebb of the tide of mass struggle. The Swaraj Party was the party of the progressive bourgeoisie moving to co-operation with imperialism along the inclined plane of parliamentarism. From its inception it slid downwards ever closer to the supposed enemy. At the new elections in the autumn of 1926 the Swaraj Party suffered a marked setback, except in Madras.

But the hopes of the bourgeoisie for harmonious co-operation with imperialism were destined to end in disillusionment. As soon as it was clear that the forces of the national struggle had weakened, and that the Swarajists, divorced from the mass movement, were reduced to pleading for terms, imperialism reversed the engines, began to go back on the partial economic concessions granted to the Indian bourgeoisie during the previous years, and opened an economic offensive to re-establish full domination, through the Currency Bill of 1927, the establishment of the rupee ratio at 1s.6d. (in the face of universal Indian protests), and the new Steel Protection Bill of 1927, which undermined the protection of the 1924 Act by introducing preferential rates for British steel. Towards the end of 1927 the Simon Commission was announced, to settle the fate of the future constitution for India; no Indian representatives were included in the Simon Commission.

Thus the Indian bourgeoisie, however unwillingly, found themselves once again forced to turn aside from their hopes of co-operation and to look towards the possibility of harnessing the mass forces once more in their support, if they were to have any prospect of driving a successful bargain. But the conditions were now far more difficult and complicated than a decade ago. For in the interval the mass forces had begun to awaken to new life

of their own, to independent political expression and aims, and to active struggle, not only against imperialism, but against the Indian exploiters. The triangular character of the contest, or rather the deeper contest between imperialism and the Indian masses, with the hesitant and vacillating rôle of the Indian bourgeoisie, was now coming far more clearly to the front. Hence the peculiar character of the new stage of struggle which now opened out, developing from its first signs in the latter part of 1927 to its full strength in 1930-34; on the one hand, the far more widespread, intensive and prolonged character of the struggle; on the other, the spasmodic, interrupted tempo of development, the zigzag vacillation of aims, the repeated accompanying negotiations, and sudden truces without settlement, until the final collapse.

The new factor which developed for the first time in the middle years of the nineteen-twenties, and gave the decisive impetus to the new wave of struggle, though not yet its leadership, was the emergence of the industrial working class as an independent force, conducting its own struggle with unexampled energy and heroism, and beginning to develop its own leadership. With this advance the new ideology of the working class, or Socialism, began to develop for the first time as a political factor in India, and the influence of its ideas began to penetrate the youth and the left sections of Indian Nationalism, bringing new life and energy and wider horizons. The Cawnpore conspiracy trial of 1924 showed the sharp look-out of imperialism to stamp out the first signs of revolutionary working-class politics. The growth of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, which came to the front during 1926 and 1927, preceded the great advance of trade unionism and the strike movement in 1928. The colossal strike movement of 1928, with a total of 31,647,000 working days lost, or more than during the previous five years put together; the growth of the new fighting Girni Kamgar Union or Red Flag Union of the Bombay textile workers to an officially returned membership of 65,000 within a year, and increase of trade-union membership by 70 per cent; the foremost political rôle of the working class in the demonstrations against the Simon Commission during that year; the rising militant consciousness of the trade unions and the victory of the left wing in the Trade Union Congress in 1929—these were the harbingers and the driving force that led to the new wave of struggle of the Indian people.

The reflection of this advance began to appear in the emergence of a new left wing in the Congress and the national movement. Towards the end of 1927 Jawaharlal Nehru returned from a prolonged tour of over a year and a half in Europe, where he had



made contact with socialist circles and ideas. The Madras Congress, at the end of 1927, showed the advance of new leftward tendencies, especially among the youth. A resolution for complete independence as the aim of the national movement—always previously opposed by the leadership—was unanimously carried (in the absence of Gandhi, who later condemned it as “hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed”). Boycott of the Simon Commission was determined; at the same time participation in an All-Parties Conference was approved to evolve an alternative constitutional scheme. The Congress affiliated to the newly founded International League Against Imperialism.

The apparent victory of the left at the 1927 Congress was superficial and based on lack of opposition. But as 1928 unfolded its events, with the success of the demonstrations against the Simon Commission, with the advance of the strike movement, and with the growth of the newly founded Independence League and of youth and student organisations, it was clear to the older leadership that the left was developing as a force which might rapidly sweep the Congress. At the All-Parties Conference the older leadership, in collaboration with the moderate or reactionary elements outside the Congress, evolved a scheme (known as the Nehru Report, from the Chairman, the elder Nehru) for a constitution based on responsible government within the British Empire, thus shelving the demand for independence. But in face of the rising tide of feeling, there was doubt whether this scheme would be accepted by the Congress.

In this critical balance of forces, with the certainty of big new struggles ahead in a far more advanced situation than a decade previously, the right-wing leadership once again turned to Gandhi, whom they had previously thrust aside, and whose star now once again rose. At the Calcutta session at the end of 1928 Gandhi returned to active leadership of the Congress. Whatever the views of the moderate leaders might be with regard to his personal idiosyncrasies, there was no question that he was the most subtle and experienced politician of the older group, with unrivalled mass prestige which world publicity had now enhanced as the greatest Indian figure; the ascetic defender of property in the name of the most religious and idealist principles of humility and love of poverty; the invincible metaphysical-theological casuist who could justify and reconcile anything and everything in an astounding tangle of explanations and arguments which in a man of common clay might have been called dishonest quibbling, but in the great ones of the earth like MacDonald or Gandhi is recognised as a higher plane of spiritual reasoning; the prophet who by his personal saintliness and selflessness could unlock the

door to the hearts of the masses where the moderate bourgeois leaders could not hope for a hearing—and the best guarantee of the shipwreck of any mass movement which had the blessing of his association. All the hopes of the bourgeoisie were fixed on Gandhi as the man to ride the waves, to unleash just enough of the mass movement in order to drive a successful bargain, and at the same time to save India from revolution.

At the Calcutta Congress in December, 1928, Gandhi had difficulty in securing acceptance of the Nehru Report. The resolution he drafted promised that this Report should not be regarded as in any way withdrawing the aim of complete independence, and that if this Report were not accepted by the Government by December 31, 1929 (Gandhi had originally drafted 1930, giving two years' respite, but 1929 was carried), then the Congress would revive the campaign of non-violent non-co-operation, and this time begin with non-payment of taxes. Even this resolution was only carried by a relatively narrow majority.

The twelve months of delay secured time for imperialism to act. Imperialism did not waste its opportunity. In March, 1929, all the most prominent leaders of the rising working-class movement were arrested from all parts of India, and brought to the remote court of Meerut for trial (where they could be tried without jury); the trial was dragged out for four years, while they were held in prison, during all the succeeding wave of struggle, before even sentence was pronounced. Besides representing the decisive leadership of the trade unions and of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, three of the leaders arrested were also members of the All-India Congress Committee or elected Executive of the National Congress. Thus the working class was decapitated, and the strongest and most clear-headed and determined leaders of the left, with a real mass basis, removed, before the struggle in the hands of the Congress leadership was allowed to begin. At the same time was put into force the Public Safety Ordinance, by decree of the Viceroy, directed against the militant forces.

One last effort was made by the moderate leadership to reach an agreement with imperialism. Following a very vague statement by the Viceroy on October 31, 1929, which made a reference to the "goal of Dominion status" to be reached at some unknown future date (a statement which, as *The Times* declared on the following day, "contains no promises and reveals no change of policy"), the party leaders in India united to issue a response; known as the Delhi Manifesto, wholeheartedly offering co-operation: "We appreciate the sincerity underlying the declaration. . . . We hope to be able to tender our co-operation with His Majesty's Government in their effort to evolve a scheme for :

Dominion constitution suitable to India's needs." The statement was signed by Gandhi, Mrs. Besant, Motilal Nehru, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jawaharlal Nehru and others; the latter disapproved of it, and later judged it "wrong and dangerous"; but at the time he was, as he states, "talked into signing" it on the grounds that, as President-Elect, he would otherwise be breaking unity.

The Delhi Manifesto was received with delight by imperialism as a sign of weakening. It produced no practical result save to confuse the Congress ranks; the subsequent meeting with the Viceroy on the eve of the Congress was fruitless.

At the Lahore Congress, accordingly, at the end of 1929 the decision for action was taken. The Congress authorised the All-India Congress Committee "whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes". At midnight, as 1930 was ushered in, the Flag of Indian Independence (red, white and green—later, the red was withdrawn and substituted by saffron) was unfurled. On January 26, 1930, the first Independence Day was celebrated throughout India in vast demonstrations at which the pledge to struggle for complete independence was read out, proclaiming it "a crime against man and God to submit any longer" to British rule, and declaring the conviction that "if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes, without doing violence even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured".

What was to be the aim of the struggle that now opened? What was to be the plan of campaign? What were to be the minimum conditions which would be regarded as justifying a settlement? In what way was such irresistible pressure to be brought on the British Government as to compel "the end of this inhuman rule"? On all these questions there was from the outset no clearness.

Complete independence might appear to have been the defined aim of the campaign, and was probably so regarded by the majority of the Congress membership and by the masses who responded to the Congress call. Indeed, the recorded last dying words of Motilal Nehru, who died on the eve of the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement, appear to suggest that this had been his conception of the struggle: "Let me die, if die I must, in the lap of a free India. Let me sleep my last sleep, not in a subject country, but in a free one."

This was not, however, the conception of Gandhi. Immediately after Lahore he published a statement, through the *New York World* of January 9, that "the independence resolution need frighten nobody" (repeated in his letter to the Viceroy in March), and on January 30, through his paper *Young India*, he made an offer of Eleven Points, covering various reforms (rupee ratio of 1s. 4d.,

total prohibition, reduction of land revenue and military expenditure, protective tariff on foreign cloth, etc.) in return for which civil disobedience would be called off.

Gandhi's strategy corresponded to his conception of the struggle. Given this understanding, that it was not a strategy intended to lead to the victory of independence, but to find the means in the midst of a formidable revolutionary wave to maintain leadership of the mass movement and yet place the maximum bounds and restraints upon it, it was a skilful and able strategy. This was shown already in his brilliant choice of the first objective of the campaign and the method of conducting it. He decided to lead the fight against the salt monopoly of the Government. This diverted the fight from the possibility of participation by the industrial working class, the one force which Gandhi has made clear in every utterance that he fears in India; it was capable of enlisting the support and popular interest of the peasantry, while diverting them from any struggle against the landlords. So followed the march to Dandi, on the seashore, by Gandhi and his seventy-eight hand-picked followers, dragging on through three precious weeks, with the news-reel cameras of the world clicking away, while the masses were called on to wait expectant.

Nevertheless, the moment the three weeks were completed with the ceremonial boiling of salt by Gandhi on the seashore on April 6 (not followed by arrest), the overwhelming mass movement which broke loose throughout the country took the leadership on both sides by surprise. The official instructions given were confined to the most limited and relatively harmless forms of civil disobedience: violation of the Salt Law, boycott of foreign cloth, picketing of the foreign cloth shops and Government liquor shops. Gandhi's conception of the movement was shown in the instructions given by him on April 9:

"Our path has already been chalked out for us. Let every village fetch or manufacture contraband salt, sisters should picket liquor-shops, opium dens and foreign cloth dealers' shops. Young and old in every home should ply the takli and spin and get woven heaps of yarn every day. Foreign cloth should be burnt. Hindus should eschew untouchability. Hindus, Mussulmans, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians should all achieve heart unity. Let the majority rest content with what remains after the minorities have been satisfied. Let students leave Government schools and colleges, and Government servants resign their service and devote themselves to the service of the people, and we shall soon find that Purna Swaraj will come knocking at our doors."

The mass movement which developed already in April went considerably beyond these simple limits, with rising strikes, powerful mass demonstrations, the Chittagong Armoury Raid in Bengal, the incidents at Peshawar, which was in the hands of the people for a fortnight, and the beginnings of spontaneous no-rent movements by the peasants in a number of localities, especially in the United Provinces, where the Congress vainly sought to mediate on a basis of 50 per cent payment of rents.

Most significant for the whole future was the refusal of the Garhwali soldiers at Peshawar to fire on the people. Following the arrest of local leaders, armoured cars were sent to cow the angry mass demonstrators; one armoured car was burned, its occupants escaping; thereupon wholesale firing on the crowds was followed by hundreds of deaths and casualties. Two platoons of the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Garhwali Rifles, Hindu troops in the midst of a Moslem crowd, refused the order to fire, broke ranks, fraternised with the crowd, and a number handed over their arms. Immediately after this, the military and police were completely withdrawn from Peshawar; from April 25 to May 4 the city was in the hands of the people, until powerful British forces, with air squadrons, were concentrated to "recapture" Peshawar; there was no resistance. The Government subsequently refused all demands for an enquiry into the incident. Seventeen men of the Garhwali Rifles were subjected by court-martial to heavy sentences, one to transportation for life, one to fifteen years' rigorous imprisonment, and fifteen to terms varying from three to ten years.

When it became clear that the power of the mass movement was exceeding the limits set it, and that the authority of Gandhi, who had been left at liberty, was in danger of waning, on May 5 the Government arrested Gandhi. The official justification for the arrest was stated in the Government *communiqué*:

"While Mr. Gandhi has continued to deplore these outbreaks of violence, his protests against his unruly followers have become weaker and weaker, and it is evident that he is unable to control them. . . . Every provision will be made for his health and comfort during his detention."

The response to the arrest was shown in the wave of hartals and mass strikes all over India. In the industrial town of Sholapur in the Bombay Presidency, with 140,000 inhabitants, of whom 50,000 were textile operatives, the workers held possession of the town for a week, replacing the police and establishing their own administration, until martial law was proclaimed on May 12. "Even the Congress leaders had lost control over the mob, which

was seeking to establish a régime of its own," reported the correspondent of *The Times* on May 14, 1930: "They took charge of the administration," reported the *Poona Star*, "and tried to establish their own laws and regulations." Contemporary evidence bears witness to the complete order maintained.

Imperialist repression was limitless. Ordinances followed one another in rapid succession, creating a situation comparable to martial law. In June the Congress and all its organisations were declared illegal. Official figures recorded 60,000 civil resisters sentenced in less than a year up to the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement in the spring of 1931. These figures are certainly an underestimate, since they omit the masses sentenced for offences of intimidation, rioting, etc., and cover only those recognised by the Government as political prisoners. The very detailed Nationalist records place the total at 90,000.

Imprisonment was the least of the forms of repression. The jails were filled to overflowing, and it was clear that wholesale imprisonment was powerless to check the movement. Therefore the principal weapon employed was physical terrorism. The records of indiscriminate lathi charges, beating up, firing on unarmed crowds, killing and wounding of men and women, and punitive expeditions made an ugly picture. The strictest measures were operated to cast a veil of censorship over the whole proceedings; but the careful records of the Congress provide volumes of certified and attested facts and incidents which throw some light on the brutality employed.

Nevertheless, the power of the movement during 1930, exceeding every calculation of the authorities, and growing in spite of repression, began to raise the most serious alarm in the imperialist camp. By July 6, 1930, the *Observer* was reporting the "defeatism" and "demoralisation of Europeans" in India.

It became essential for imperialism at all costs to negotiate a settlement. On the basis of the struggle and sacrifices of the Indian people the Congress leadership held a strong hand. The only hopes of imperialism for salvation were now placed in the moderate national leadership, whose alarm at the extension and unknown possibilities of the mass struggle they knew to be genuine.

Negotiations were begun in the autumn of 1930, but without result. On January 20, 1931, MacDonald as Prime Minister made the declaration at the Round Table Conference:

"I pray that by our labours India will possess the only thing which she now lacks to give her the status of a Dominion among the British Commonwealth of Nations—the responsibility and

the cares, the burdens and the difficulties, but the pride and the honour of Responsible Self-Government."

The bait was thus held out in a rotund phrase which in hard practice committed the Government to nothing, as subsequent events were to show. The Round Table Conference was then adjourned to enable the Congress to attend. On January 26, 1931, Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee were released unconditionally and given freedom to meet. On March 4 the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement was signed, and the struggle was declared provisionally suspended.

The Irwin-Gandhi Agreement secured not a single aim of the Congress struggle (not even the repeal of the Salt Tax). Civil Disobedience was to be withdrawn. Congress was to participate in the Round-Table Conference, which it had sworn to boycott. Not a single concrete step to self-government was granted. The basis of discussion at the Round-Table Conference was to be a Federal Constitution with "Indian responsibility"—but there were to be "reservations of safeguards in the interests of India". The Ordinances were to be withdrawn and political prisoners released—but not prisoners guilty of "violence" or "incitement to violence" or soldiers guilty of disobeying orders. Freedom of boycott of foreign goods was to be allowed—but not "exclusively against British goods", not "for political ends", not with any picketing that might be regarded as involving "coercion, intimidation, restraint, hostile demonstration, obstruction to the public". And so on with the clauses, which gave with one hand and took away with another. The maximum gain was the right of peaceful boycott of foreign cloth—the one positive element which very clearly pointed to the decisive interests on the Indian side behind the agreement.

The fact that the British Government had been compelled to sign a public Treaty with the leader of the National Congress, which it had previously declared an unlawful association and sought to smash, was undoubtedly a tremendous demonstration of the strength of the national movement. This fact produced at first a widespread sense of elation and victory. Only slowly, as the meaning of the terms began to be understood, the realisation dawned that nothing whatever had been gained. All the aims of complete independence and no compromise with imperialism, so loudly proclaimed at Lahore, had gone up in smoke.

The Irwin-Gandhi Agreement thus repeated the Bardoli experience on an enlarged scale. Once again the movement was suddenly and mysteriously called off at the moment when it was reaching its height.

The Karachi Congress, hastily convened the same month, unanimously endorsed the Agreement. Jawaharlal Nehru was given the task of moving it, "not without great mental conflict and physical distress". "Was it for this", he thought, "that our people had behaved so gallantly for a year? Were all our brave words and deeds to end in this?" He felt, however, that it would only be "personal vanity" to express his dissent.

A concession was made to Left Nationalism at the Karachi Congress by the adoption of a progressive social and economic programme, embodied in a "Fundamental Rights" resolution, which included a basic democratic charter of an advanced type, nationalisation of key industries and transport, labour rights and agrarian reform. This programme, which remains valid, marked an important step forward for the Congress. It was not, however, compensation for the capitulation embodied in the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement.

Outside the Congress, sharp criticism of the Agreement was expressed from the youth and from the working-class movement. This was shown in numerous resolutions from youth organisations and conferences, and in the hostile demonstrations of Bombay workers against Gandhi on his departure for the Round-Table Conference. Such demonstrations, *The Times* noted, would have been unthinkable ten years earlier.

Imperialism, once it had secured the whip-hand, was determined to use its advantage to the utmost. The "truce" from the outset had been one-sided; repression had continued. Gandhi returned in the last days of 1931 to hear a pitiful tale from his colleagues. He cabled at once to the Viceroy, begging for an interview. It was refused. Imperialism had utilised every day of that nine months' truce (while the comedy had been enacted in London) to complete its grim preparations for a decisive battle. Sir John Anderson, with experience of the "Black and Tan" régime in Ireland, had been nominated Governor of Bengal to take in hand the arrangements. There was to be no surprise this time. The Congress was to be taught a lesson. It was to be a fight to a finish, with unconditional surrender as the only terms.

Swift and sharp the blow fell on January 4, 1932. On the same day negotiations were broken; the Viceroy issued his Manifesto; Gandhi was arrested; Ordinances appeared in a batch (no dribbling out this time, one by one, as they were thought of, as in 1930, but straight from the pigeon-holes on the first day); all the principal Congress leaders and organisers were arrested all over the country; the Congress and all its organisations were declared illegal, their Press banned, their premises, funds and property confiscated. A triumph of organisation.



The Government made clear that the object was a knock-out blow. Sir Samuel Hoare informed the House of Commons that the Ordinances were "very drastic and severe" and that there was to be no "drawn battle" this time.

The Congress leadership was taken by surprise. This was such a sudden change from the atmosphere of the Round-Table Conference. They had made no preparations. In 1930 the Congress had been on the offensive. Now it was thrown on the defensive. They had not realised the price of the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement. Dr. Syed Mahmud, of the Congress Working Committee, informed the India League Delegation:

"The world does not know anything about the resolution that Mahatma Gandhi drafted and proposed before the Working Committee. The Mahatma was bent on co-operation. . . . The Government did not want co-operation. From my own inside knowledge I can say that the Congress was not prepared for the conflict. We had hopes that the Mahatma would bring peace somehow on his return from London."

("Condition of India", Report of India League Delegation, 1933, p. 27.)

He added "that he and his colleagues had definite information that the Government's plans for repression were ready in November while Gandhi was still in London, and that the Government's sudden blow at first staggered the Congress".

Repression this time, in 1932-33, far exceeded the level of 1930-31. In the first four months, according to the public report of Pandit Malaviya on May 2, 1932, there were 80,000 arrests. After fifteen months, by the end of March, 1933, according to the report to the illegal session of the Congress at Calcutta in April, 1933, the total had reached 120,000 arrests. Some record of the accompanying wholesale violence, physical outrages, shooting and beating up, punitive expeditions, collective fines on villages and seizure of lands and property of villagers can be found in the India League Delegation Report, "Condition of India", issued in 1933.

The Government had counted on a fight to a finish in six weeks. The toughness of the national movement was such that the battle, despite the unfavourable conditions, dragged on for twenty-nine months before the final surrender. By the summer of 1932 Gandhi abandoned all public interest in the national struggle, and devoted himself to the cause of the Harijans (untouchables). His dramatic "fast unto death" in September was directed, not against the repression, not to any object of the life-and-death struggle of the national movement going on, but to prevent the

scheme of separate representation for the "depressed classes". It ended, neither in death nor in the attainment of its objective, but in the Poona Pact, by which the number of reserved seats for the "depressed classes" was doubled. The episode served to divert attention from the national struggle, of which he was still supposed to be the responsible leader.

In July, 1933, after a request by Gandhi for an interview with the Viceroy had been refused unless civil disobedience were first finally ended, the Congress leadership decided to end mass civil disobedience and replace it by individual civil disobedience. At the same time the Acting President issued orders dissolving all Congress organisations. The Government showed no response save to increase its repression against the individual civil resisters. In August Gandhi was arrested anew, but was released before the end of the month, following a fast.

It was not until May, 1934, that the final end came to the struggle which had opened with such magnificent power in 1930. In May, 1934, the All-India Congress Committee was allowed to meet at Patna to end civil disobedience unconditionally (with the solitary exception recommended by Gandhi). There were no terms and no concessions from the Government. At the same time decisions were taken, for which the preliminary steps had already been prepared, for the new stage of contesting the coming elections directly on behalf of the Congress.

In June, 1934, the Government lifted the ban on the Congress, but not yet on many of its subsidiary organisations, youth organisations, peasants' unions and the Red Shirts of the North-West Frontier Province. In July, 1934, the Government proclaimed the Communist Party of India illegal. The new stage was opening.

In the autumn of 1934 Gandhi resigned from membership of the Congress, his work for the time being accomplished. In a parting statement he explained that "there is a growing and vital difference of outlook between many Congressmen and myself". It was clear that for "the majority of Congressmen" non-violence was not "a fundamental creed", but only "a policy". Socialist groups were growing in the Congress in numbers and influence: "if they gain ascendancy in the Congress, as they well may, I cannot remain in the Congress". The new stage was making itself felt; and it was unwelcome to the old ideas.

The unhappy final ending of the great wave of struggle of 1930-34 should not blind us for a moment to its epic achievement, its deep and lasting lessons and its gigantic permanent gains. The reasons, in the tactics and methods pursued, for the temporary failure of a movement which had at its command such limitless

resources of popular support, enthusiasm, devotion and sacrifice, and which was undoubtedly within reach of success, constitute a lesson which needs to be learned and studied again and again for the future. Those reasons have been implicit in this narrative. But the national movement can be proud for the record of those years. Imperialism dreamed in those years by every device in the modern armoury of repression to smash and cow the people of India into submission to its will, and to exterminate the movement for independence. It failed. Within two years, after all those heavy blows, the national movement was advancing again, stronger than ever. The struggle had not been in vain. The furnace of those years of struggle helped to forge and awaken a new and greater national unity, self-confidence, pride and determination.

#### *4. National Struggle on the Eve of the War*

When the National Congress met at Lucknow in the spring of 1936, it was still recovering its forces from the effects of the heavy struggle and Government repression which had reached a climax in 1934. Membership stood at below half a million, registering 457,000.

The reactionary constitution which was the parting legacy of Gandhi; and which had been adopted at the Bombay Congress in 1934, had undoubtedly a restricting effect (it had to be partially modified at Lucknow). The centre of activity had been transferred to the parliamentary field, with the participation in the elections for the Legislative Assembly in the end of 1934; but the parliamentary activity bore a humdrum character and aroused no mass interest. The presidential address of Nehru at the Lucknow Congress unsparingly criticised the weakness of the existing position, and declared that "we have largely lost touch with the masses".

The presidential address of Jawaharlal Nehru at the Lucknow Congress was memorable for its proclamation of the socialist aim, for its focussing of the Indian struggle in the context of the gathering world struggle against fascism and reaction, and for its demand for a broad mass front or "joint popular front" of all the anti-imperialist forces, uniting the workers and peasantry with the middle-class elements dominantly represented in the Congress. New stirrings were visible on all sides. The socialist wing was advancing in the Congress. Already representing an important, though small, grouping at Lucknow, by the Faizpur Congress in December, 1936, it numbered one-third of the Congress Committee. The proposal put forward by Nehru at Lucknow for the collective affiliation of the workers' and peasants' organisations to the Congress was not adopted, being defeated on the Congress



In July, 1937, Congress Ministries were formed in the six Provinces where the Congress held absolute majorities in the Lower House: Bombay, Madras, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Orissa. Soon after, the access of a group of eight non-Congress members in the North-west Frontier Province to co-operation with the Congress and acceptance of Congress discipline (in a signed declaration) gave the Congress an absolute majority there also, leading to the formation of a Congress Ministry. Thus Congress Ministries were established in seven of the eleven Provinces of British India, with an aggregate population of close on 160 millions, or three-fifths of the population of British India, and over two-fifths of the total population of India. Congress governments were later formed in Assam and Sind.

The Congress Provincial Ministries were in office for over two years until, with the war crisis and the rupture with the Central Government, they resigned in November, 1939.

The Congress Ministries in the Provinces were not in any modern parliamentary sense Governments. Gandhi, in an article in the *Harijan* in August, 1938, made clear the extreme limitations of their powers and their consequent special rôle as instruments in the real struggle for liberation:

"Democratic Britain has set up an ingenious system in India which, when you look at it in its nakedness, is nothing but a highly organised military control. It is not less so under the present Government of India Act. The Ministers are mere puppets so far as the real control is concerned. The Collectors and Police may at a mere command from the Governors unseat the Ministers, arrest them and put them in a lock-up. Hence it is that I have suggested that the Congress has entered upon office, not to work the Act in the manner expected by the framers, but in a manner so as to hasten the day of substituting it by a genuine Act of India's own making."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE LABOUR AND SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

"The Indian proletariat has already matured sufficiently to wage a class-conscious and political mass struggle—and that being the case, Anglo-Russian methods in India are played out."—*Lenin in 1908.*

#### 1. *The Growth and Conditions of the Working Class*

THE INDUSTRIAL working class in India, in the modern sense, is not numerically large in relation to the population; but it is concentrated in the decisive centres, and is the most coherent,

advanced, resolute and basically revolutionary section of the population.

There are no adequate statistics of the extent of the Indian working class. The 1931 Census Report records:

“The number of workers employed in organised labour is extraordinarily low for a population the size of India’s, and the daily average number of hands employed by establishments in British India to which the Factories Act applies is only 1,553,169. . . .

“The total India figures for persons employed in plantations, mines, industry and transport in 1921 was 24,239,555, of whom only 2,685,909 were employed in organised establishments employing 10 or more employees.

“The total figure under the same heads in 1931 amounts to 26,187,689; and if labour in similar establishments is in the same proportion, it will now number 2,901,776. Figures of the daily average of persons employed indicate that it has increased during the last decade at the rate of about 30 per cent, in which case it would now number 3,500,000. Probably 5,000,000 may be fairly taken as the figure of organised labour in India in 1931.”

(Census of India, 1931, Vol. I, Part I, p. 285.)

In the broadest sense, the number of wage-workers in India may be estimated at about 60 millions. The returns of the Indian Franchise Committee showed 56½ millions for 1931.

“The total number of agricultural labourers, which was given as 21·5 million in 1921, was shown by the census of 1931 to be over 31·5 million, of whom 23 million were estimated by the Indian Franchise Committee in 1931 to be ‘landless’, while the total number of non-agricultural labourers, as estimated by the Indian Franchise Committee, was 25 million. There are, therefore, about 56·5 million wage labourers out of 154 million persons in all occupations in the whole of India, or in other words, over 36 per cent of the people in all occupations depend upon wage labour as a means of livelihood.”

(I.L.O. Report 1938, “Industrial Labour in India”, p. 30.)

In the narrower sense of the industrial proletariat in modern or other than petty industry, the Industrial Census of 1921 reached a total of 2·6 millions employed in establishments employing ten or more workers. There has been no later Industrial Census; but the estimate of the 1931 Census, given above, would place the total at about 3½ millions. The only exact records are those of the Factories Act administration; the latest 1934 Factories Act covers power-driven factories employing twenty or more, or, in some cases, ten or more, workers; the total in 1935 was 1,610,022

workers. To these should be added 245,000 workers returned as employed in "large industrial establishments" in the Indian States, giving a full total of 1,855,000 workers in modern large-scale industry in India.

Taking this as a basis, we reach the following:

Factory workers in medium and larger factories (on the above basis)	1,855,000
Miners	371,000
Railwaymen	636,000
Water Transport (Dockers, Seamen)	361,000
Total of above groups	<u>3,223,000</u>

These 3½ million represent the kernel of the industrial proletariat in modern large-scale industry in India to-day. Excluded from this total are all the workers in petty industry (establishments with under ten workers), as well as in larger enterprises without power-driven machinery (e.g., cigarette-making, with, in some cases, over fifty workers). From the standpoint of the potential strength of the organised labour movement, we should add the over 1 million workers employed on the plantations, who are employed in fully large-scale enterprise under the most scientific slave-driving conditions, and have already shown a high degree of militant activity in periods of unrest, although so far cut off from all organisation and held under conditions of complete isolation and subjection; and a proportion of the workers in petty industry and in the larger unregulated enterprises. The immediate effective organisable strength of the Indian working class should therefore certainly represent over 5 million workers.

Of the conditions of the industrial working class in India some general picture has been given in Chapter IV. It may be useful to recall the conclusions reached by the British Trades Union Congress delegation to India which reported in 1928:

"All enquiries go to show that the vast majority of workers in India do not receive more than about 1s. per day. In the province of Bengal, which includes the largest mass of industrial workers, investigators declared that as far as they could ascertain, 60 per cent of workers were in receipt of wages of not more than 1s. 2d. a day in the highest instance, scaling down to as low as 7d. to 9d. for men and 3d. to 7d. in the case of children and women. . . . Our own enquiries support these figures and, as a matter of fact, many cases have been quoted to us of daily rates in operation which descend to 3½d. for women and 7d. or even less for men."

(A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth, "Report on Labour Conditions in India", Trades Union Congress, 1928, p. 10.)

The same delegation reported with regard to the housing of the workers:

"We visited the workers' quarters wherever we stayed, and had we not seen them we could not have believed that such evil places existed. . . . Here is a group of houses in 'lines', the owner of which charges the tenant of each dwelling 4s. 6d. a month as rent. Each house, consisting of one dark room used for all purposes, living, cooking and sleeping, is 9 feet by 9 feet, with mud walls and loose-tiled roof, and has a small open compound in front, a corner of which is used as a latrine. There is no ventilation in the living-room except by a broken roof or that obtained through the entrance door when open. Outside the dwelling is a long narrow channel which receives the waste matter of all descriptions and where flies and other insects abound. . . . Outside all the houses on the edge of each side of the strip of land between the 'lines' are the exposed gulleys, at some places stopped up with garbage, refuse and other waste matter, giving forth horrible smells repellent in the extreme. It is obvious that these gulleys are often used as conveniences, especially by children. . . .

"The overcrowding and insanitary conditions almost everywhere prevailing demonstrate the callousness and wanton neglect of their obvious duties by the authorities concerned."

(*Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.)

The conditions of the plantation workers reach the lowest levels. "In the Assam Valley tea-gardens (Assam and Bengal produce by far the greater bulk of the tea in India) the average monthly earnings of men workers settled in the gardens are about Rs. 7-13-0, of women and children about Rs. 5-14-0 and Rs. 4-4-0 respectively" (Shiva Rao, "The Industrial Worker in India", 1939, p. 128). This is equivalent to 2s. 8d. a week for men, 2s. a week for women and 1s. 5½d. for children. The addition of free "housing", medical treatment and other concessions only emphasises the slave conditions. In the Surma Valley the rates are still lower. In the South India plantations the rates have been lowered to 4 to 5 annas (4½d. to 5½d.) a day for men and less than 3 annas (3½d.) for women.

The fantastic profits extracted on the basis of this rate of exploitation are notorious, and reached the most colossal heights in the boom after the last war. The delegation of the Dundee Jute Trade Unions to India reported in 1925 with regard to the jute industry:

"When Reserve Funds and Profits are added together the total gain to the shareholders in the ten years (1915-1924)



reached the enormous total of £300 million sterling, or 90 per cent per annum of the capital. There are from 300,000 to 327,000 workers employed at an average wage to-day of £12 10s. per annum. A profit of £300 million taken from 300,000 workers in ten years means £1,000 per head. That means £100 a year from each worker. And as the average wage is about £12 10s. per head, it means that the average annual profit is eight times the wages bill."

(T. Johnston and J. F. Sime, "Exploitation in India", pp. 5-6.)

With regard to the cotton industry the Tariff Board Enquiry reported in 1927:

"An examination of the balance sheets of the Bombay mills shows that for 1920, 35 companies comprising 42 mills declared dividends of 40 per cent and over, of which 10 companies comprising 14 mills paid 100 per cent and over and two mills paid over 200 per cent. In 1921 the number was 41 companies comprising 47 mills, out of which 9 companies comprising 11 mills paid dividends of 100 per cent and over."

(Report of the Indian Tariff Board, Cotton Textile Enquiry, 1927, Vol. I, p. 83.)

Cases were reported of dividends as high as 365 per cent.

This eldorado of profit-making could not continue indefinitely, although exceptionally high rates were maintained right up to the world economic crisis.

The crisis and economic depression hit Indian industry hard. Ruthless measures of rationalisation and wage-cutting were pushed through to maintain profits, especially in the textile industry.

The level of profits to-day, while no longer equalling the orgies of the post-war boom, still abundantly reveals the exceptional exploitation. Thus in jute, the Reliance Jute Mills Company paid dividends of 50 per cent in 1935, 42½ per cent in 1936 and 30 per cent in 1937. In cotton, the Muir Mills Company paid dividends of 35 per cent in 1935, 27½ per cent in 1936 and 22½ per cent in 1937. In tea, the New Dooars Tea Company paid dividends of 50 per cent both in 1935 and 1936; the Nagaisuke Tea Company paid 60 per cent in 1935 and 50 per cent in 1936; and the East Hope Estates Company paid 23 per cent in 1935, 33 per cent in 1936 and 40 per cent in 1937.

Even a portion of these colossal profits during the twenty years since the war of 1914-18, aggregating many hundreds of millions of pounds, could have done much to wipe out the most extreme scandals of the housing of the workers and begin the most

elementary measures of social protection and hygiene. The responsibility to adopt the measures which could make this possible has never been recognised by the existing régime in India. In no leading country in the world are the rich let off so lightly in taxation as in India, while the main burden of taxation is placed squarely on the shoulders of the poorest. The peasants have to pay the land revenue, while the landlords' incomes are exempted from income tax. The workers have to pay through crushing indirect taxation, while the weight of income tax on the higher incomes is kept low. The total annual burden of indirect taxation, according to Sir James Grigg, the Finance Member of the Government of India, speaking in April, 1938, amounted to eight times the total of direct taxation.

Labour and social legislation in India is no less backward ; and the reality is far below the appearance on paper. Factory legislation of a kind was initiated in 1881, largely under the pressure of Lancashire employers alarmed at the growth of the Indian mill industry. For decades it was to a considerable extent a dead letter, even in the very limited respects in which it was directed, owing to lack of provision for enforcement.

"Taking all labour legislation into account, affecting factories, mines, plantations, docks, railways, harbours, etc., it is doubtful whether more than seven or eight millions at the outside come within its protective influence. The rest who constitute by far the greater majority of the industrial workers are engaged in small or what is known as unregulated industries."

(Shiva Rao, "The Industrial Worker in India", 1939, p. 210.)

The main factories legislation proper extended in 1936 to only 1,650,000 workers, or a minute fraction of the Indian working class. Even here the weakness of machinery for enforcement impairs its effectiveness. Industry in the Indian States is completely outside the Factories Act.

The main body of industry in India is unregulated. Here child labour, even of the tenderest years, is rampant ; hours are unlimited ; the most elementary provisions for health are lacking.

Social legislation in the modern sense is completely absent. There is no health insurance, no medical provision or sickness benefit, no provision for old age, no provision for unemployment and no general system of education. Even the most elementary requirements for public health, street-cleaning, water-supply, lighting, removal of refuse are almost entirely neglected in the working-class areas, while elaborate provision is made in the rich residential quarters inhabited by the Europeans and upper-class

Indians, and the proceeds of taxation are spent on these quarters. The rotting slums, which bring disease and early death of their inhabitants, and regular returns of 30 to 40 per cent a year to their owners, are left to rot by the public authorities. There is no street-cleaning in the slums owned by private individuals and trusts; the narrow lanes between the lines are left covered with rotting refuse and garbage.

Thus under the enlightened protection of the "civilised" British Raj the filth-ridden conditions, limitless exploitation and servitude of the Indian workers are zealously maintained. From their carefully protected and hygienically safeguarded palaces the European lords rule over their kingdom of squalor and misery.

This is the background of the Indian labour movement. It is to the millions living in these conditions that Socialism and Trade Unionism have brought for the first time hope and confidence, an awakening to the power of combination, and the first vision of a goal which can end their misery.

## *2. Formation of the Labour Movement*

The beginnings of the labour movement in India go back half a century; but its continuous history as an organised movement dates only from the end of the first world war.

Although there was not yet any organisation, it would be a mistake to under-estimate the growth of solidarity in action and elementary class-consciousness of the Indian industrial workers during the decades preceding the war of 1914.

"Despite almost universal testimony before Commissions between 1880 and 1908 to the effect that there were no actual unions, many stated that the labourers in an individual mill were often able to act in unison and that, as a group, they were very independent. The inspector of boilers spoke in 1892 of 'an unnamed and unwritten bond of union among the workers peculiar to the people'.

"Sir Sassoon David said in 1908 that if labour 'had no proper organisation, they had an understanding among themselves'. Mr. Barucha, lately Director of Industries in Bombay Presidency, stated that 'the hands were all-powerful against the owners, and could combine, though they had not got a trade union'."

(D. H. Buchanan, "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India", p. 425.)

During 1905-9 there was a notable advance, parallel to the militant national wave. A strike in the Bombay mills against an extension of hours, serious strikes on the railways, especially the

Eastern Bengal State Railway, in the railway shops, and in the Government Press at Calcutta characterised this period. The highest point was reached with the six-day political non-strike in Bombay against the sentence of six years' imprisonment on Tilak in 1908.

Any stable organisation was not yet possible. But this was a reflection of the utter poverty and illiteracy of the workers and lack of any facilities, rather than of backwardness or lack of militancy.

It was the conditions of the close of the first world war, of the sequel of the Russian Revolution and the world revolutionary wave, that brought the Indian working class at a bound into full activity and opened the modern labour movement in India. Economic and political conditions alike contributed to the new awakening. Prices had doubled during the war; there had been no corresponding increase in wages; fantastic profits were being amassed by the employers. In the political field new demands were in the air: Congress-Muslim League unity had been achieved on the basis of a programme of immediate self-government; the first waves of revolutionary influence were reaching India.

The strike movement which began in 1918 and swept the country in 1919 and 1920 was overwhelming in its intensity. The end of 1918 saw the first great strike affecting an entire industry in a leading centre in the Bombay cotton mills; by January, 1919, 125,000 workers, covering practically all the mills, were out. The response to the hartal against the Rowlatt Acts in the spring of 1919 showed the political rôle of the workers in the forefront of the common national struggle. During 1919 strikes spread over the country. By the end of 1919 and the first half of 1920 the wave reached its height.

In the first six months of 1920 there were 200 strikes, involving 1½ million workers. This great period of militancy was the birth of the modern Indian labour movement.

Trade unions were formed by the score during this period. Many were essentially strike committees, springing up in the conditions of an immediate struggle, but without staying power. While the workers were ready for struggle the facilities for office organisation were inevitably in other hands. Hence arose the contradiction of the early Indian labour movement. There was not yet any political movement on the basis of socialism, of the conceptions of the working class and the class struggle. In consequence, the so-called "outsiders" or helpers from other class elements who came forward, for varying reasons, to give their assistance in the work of organisation, and whose assistance was in fact indispensable in this initial period, came without understand-

ing of the aims and needs of the labour movement, and brought with them the conceptions of middle-class politics. Whether their aims were philanthropic, as in some cases, careerist, as in others, or actuated by devotion to the national political struggle, as in others, they brought with them an alien outlook, and were incapable of guiding the young working-class movement on the basis of the class struggle which the workers were in fact waging. This misfortune long dogged the Indian labour movement, seriously hampering the splendid militancy and heroism of the workers; and its influences are not yet fully overcome.

It was in this period that the Indian Trade Union Congress was founded in 1920. The inaugural session was held in Bombay in October, 1920, with the national leader, Lajpat Rai, as President, and Joseph Baptista as Vice-President. In its early years this body was mainly a "top" organisation, and many of its leaders had very limited connection with the working-class movement. The official addresses mainly inculcated the principles of class peace, moral and social improvement of the workers and uplift, and voiced demands for labour legislation and welfare provisions.

Up to 1927 the Trade Union Congress had a very limited practical connection with the working-class struggle. Nevertheless it formed the ground in which the leaders of the newly forming trade unions came together, and it was therefore only a question of time for the breath of the working-class struggle to reach it. This new period opened in 1927. By that year the Trade Union Congress united fifty-seven affiliated unions, with a recorded membership of 150,555.

Despite the character of the early nominal leadership of the Indian labour movement, the Government were under no illusions as to the significance of the emergence of the working-class movement in the last two decades. Their concern was shown in the appointment of the Bengal Committee on Industrial Unrest in 1921, the Bombay Industrial Disputes Committee of 1922, and the Madras Labour Department in 1919-20, followed by the Bombay Labour Department. A Trade Union Bill was prepared in 1921, although it was not finally passed until 1926. From 1921 regular statistics of industrial disputes were recorded.

The Government were sharply aware, as their many committees and commissions of enquiry throughout this period revealed, of the menace to the whole basis of imperialism once the rising working-class movement, whose power of struggle was demonstrated throughout these post-war years, should reach political awakening and firm organisation under class-conscious leadership. Their problem was to find the means to direct the movement into "safe" channels, or what one of their reports

termed the "right type" of trade unionism—a more difficult task in a colonial country than in an imperialist country. This purpose underlay the Trade Union Act of 1926, with its special restriction of political activities. This understanding equally governed the sharp look-out against any signs of political working-class awakening.

### 3. *Political Awakening*

Nevertheless, despite all obstacles, the beginnings of political working-class awakening, of socialist and communist ideas, were slowly reaching India in the post-war years. From 1920 onwards the literature of the still very weak Communist Party of India had begun to make its way. From 1924 a journal, the *Socialist*, was appearing in Bombay under the editorship of S. A. Dange, who was to become Assistant Secretary of the Trade Union Congress. The Government lost no time to act. In 1924 the Cawnpore Trial was staged against four of the communist leaders, Dange, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmad and Das Gupta. All four were sentenced to four years' imprisonment. This was the baptism of the political working-class movement in India.

Repression could not check the advance of awakening. By 1926-27 socialist ideas were spreading widely. A new initial form of political working-class and socialist organisation began to appear in the Workers' and Peasants' Parties, which sprang up and united militant elements in the trade-union movement with left elements in the National Congress. The first Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed in Bengal in February, 1926; others followed in Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab. These were united in 1928 in the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party, which held its first Congress in December, 1928. This political expression, still suffering from many forms of initial confusion, but revealing the growing new forces, accompanied the new wave of working-class awakening, the first signs of which began to appear in 1927.

At the Delhi session of the Trade Union Congress in the spring of 1927 (which was attended by the British Communist M.P., Shapurji Saklatvala), and still more markedly at the Cawnpore session later in the year, the emergence was revealed of challenging militant voices within the leadership of trade unionism. It became speedily clear that the new working-class leadership had the support of the majority of Indian trade unionists, although the slow procedure of registration of actual voting strength delayed the final official recognition of the majority until 1929. The First of May in 1927 was for the first time celebrated in Bombay as Labour Day—the symbol of the opening of a new era of the Indian

labour movement as a conscious part of the international labour movement.

1928 saw the greatest tide of working-class advance and activity of any year of the post-war period. The centre of this advance was in Bombay. For the first time a working-class leadership had emerged, close to the workers in the factories, guided by the principles of the class struggle, and operating as a single force in the economic and political field. The response of the workers was overwhelming. The political strikes and demonstrations against the arrival of the Simon Commission in February placed the working class for the moment in the vanguard of the national struggle; for both the Congress leadership and the reformist trade-union leadership had frowned on the project and were startled by its success. Many of the Bombay municipal workers were victimised and discharged for their participation; a further strike compelled their reinstatement.

Trade-union organisation shot up. According to the Government's figures trade-union membership in Bombay, which in the three years 1923-26 had only advanced from 48,669 to 59,544, reached 75,602 by 1927, leapt forward to 95,321 by March, 1928, and to 200,325 by March, 1929. Foremost in this advance was the famous Girni Kamgar (Red Flag) Union of the Bombay mill-workers, which started during the year with a membership of only 324, and, according to the Government's *Labour Gazette* returns, had reached 54,000 by December, 1928, and 65,000 by the first quarter of 1929.

A critical point had thus been reached by the opening of 1929. The working-class movement was advancing in the forefront of the economic and political scene. The old reformist leadership was being thrust aside. The Delegation of the British Trades Union Congress in 1927-28, in which imperialism had placed great hopes, had failed in its objective of securing the affiliation of the Indian Trade Union Congress to the reformist Trade Union International in Europe. The alarm of the Government was unconcealed. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, in his speech to the Legislative Assembly in January, 1929, declared that "the disquieting spread of communist doctrines has been causing anxiety", and announced that the Government would take measures. "The growth of communist propaganda and influence," records the Government annual report on "India in 1928-29", "especially among the industrial classes of certain large towns, caused anxiety to the authorities."

In 1929 the Government acted and turned its full offensive to counter the rise of the working-class movement. The Public Safety Bill had been introduced in September, 1928, with the

object, according to the official report, "to curb communist activities in India", but had been rejected by the Legislative Assembly; in the spring of 1929 it was issued as a special Ordinance by the Viceroy. The Whitley Commission on Labour was appointed. The Trades Disputes Act was passed to provide conciliation machinery, prohibit sympathetic strikes and limit the right to strike in public utility services. The Bombay Riots Enquiry Committee was set up, and recommended that "the Government should take drastic action against the activities of the communists in Bombay"; it further raised the question whether the Trade Union Act should not be so amended "as to exclude communists from management in registered trade unions".

In March, 1929, the Government's main blow fell. The principal active leaders of the working-class movement were arrested from all over India and brought to the small inland town of Meerut, far from any industrial centre, for trial. One of the longest and most elaborate state trials in history opened.

Thirty-one leaders were originally arrested, and one more was subsequently added. The arrested men included the Vice-President, a former President and two Assistant Secretaries of the Trade Union Congress; the Secretaries of the Bombay and of the Bengal Provincial Trade Union Federations; all the officials of the Girni Kamgar Union, most of those of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union, as well as those of a number of other unions, and the Secretaries and other officials of the Workers' and Peasants' Parties in Bengal, Bombay and the United Provinces. Three members of the All-India Congress Committee were arrested, including the Bombay Provincial Secretary of the Congress. Three of the four sentenced at Cawnpore were again on trial. Three Englishmen (Ben Bradley, Philip Spratt and Lester Hutchinson) were included. When these three representatives of the English working-class movement stood in the dock with Indian workers, and eventually went to prison with them, this was a historic demonstration of living international working-class unity, shattering the old barriers and constituting a landmark of deep significance for the future fraternal relations of the British and Indian peoples.

The arrested leaders of the Indian working-class movement bore themselves in a manner which revealed that the Indian working-class movement, even though still only in an initial stage of organisation, had reached full consciousness and dignity of its rôle. The speeches of the defence remain among the most valuable documents of the Indian labour movement. A new India was revealed in them.

The Government dragged out the trial for three and a half



years—critical years of India's history, during which the best leaders of the working class were thus removed.

This trial, as historic a trial for the suppression of a rising labour movement as that of the Dorchester Labourers a century ago in British labour history, was conducted, during the main part of its course, under a Labour Government, which accepted "full responsibility" for it ("We accept full responsibility. . . . The Secretary of State is energetically backing up the Government of India": Dr. Drummond Shiels at the Labour Party Conference at Brighton in 1929). "The machinery of the law must operate," was the judgement of the *Daily Herald* on June 25, 1929. "The trial should be expedited as quickly as possible," wrote Sir Walter Citrine on October 1, 1929, in answer to the appeal of the Indian Trade Union Congress to the British Trades Union Congress; "the offence with which the accused are charged is a political offence, and one which in the opinion of the General Council does not directly affect the Indian trade-union movement as such." Later, after the trial was over and the Labour Government out of office, in 1933 the National Joint Council of the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party issued a pamphlet stating that "the whole of the proceedings from beginning to end are utterly indefensible and constitute something in the nature of a judicial scandal".

In January, 1933, savage sentences were awarded: transportation for life for Muzaffar Ahmad; twelve years' transportation for Dange, Ghate, Joglekar, Nimbkar and Spratt; ten years' transportation for Bradley, Mirajkar and Usmani; and so down to the lightest sentence of three years' rigorous imprisonment. The international agitation which followed was successful in securing drastic reduction of these sentences on appeal.

The first years after the Meerut arrests were a difficult period for the Indian labour movement. The strike movement in these years, entering into the economic crisis, met with heavy defeats.

The Meerut trial, although, as in every such case, sowing deep the seeds for the future strength and victory of the movement, dealt a heavy immediate blow to the labour movement. The Indian working class, at such an early stage of development, could not easily at once replace this leadership which had been removed. Therefore in the critical years of national struggle which followed, the political rôle of the working class was weakened—as had been the intention of imperialism.

Difficulties in the trade-union movement also followed. The victory of the left-wing majority in the Trade Union Congress, on the basis of the superior strength and practical work of organisation achieved in the preceding two years, was finally realised at

the Nagpur Trade Union Congress at the end of 1929. The old reformist leadership, finding themselves in a minority, refused to accept the democratic decision of the majority, and split the Trade Union Congress, carrying away the unions supporting them to form the Trade Union Federation. A further split followed in 1931. These splits seriously weakened the growth of Indian trade unionism for several years.

Nevertheless, the movement for unity steadily gathered force from 1934 onwards, and full reunion of Indian trade unionism in the united Trade Union Congress was finally re-established in 1940. The last returned membership of the Indian Trade Union Congress is 600,000.

The political working-class movement has also shown a marked advance in the past decade. The Workers' and Peasants' Parties, which in view of their two-class character could only form a transitional stage of growth and no permanent basis for political working-class organisation, passed out of the picture after Meerut. In 1934 the Communist Party was proclaimed illegal by the Government. Such measures could not check the rapid growth of socialist and communist influence and Marxist ideas. New accessions of strength were won after the close of the national non-co-operation struggle of 1930-34, as the younger national elements proceeded to draw the lessons of their struggle and came under the influence of socialist ideas. The period of the Congress Provincial Ministries from 1937 to 1939 was marked by a signal advance of the working-class and peasant movement, the strike wave of 1937 reaching to the largest number of workers on record. An active campaign for the lifting of the ban on the Communist Party was conducted by the Trade Union Congress and left nationalist representatives. The one-day political strike of the Bombay workers in October, 1939, revealed the rôle of the working class in the vanguard of the political movement. In 1942 the ban on the Communist Party was lifted, reflecting the growth of its mass influence, and opening a new period of extended political activity and responsibility of the Indian working-class movement in the increasingly critical situation.

### CHAPTER XIII

## CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

"We will suppose that the Rev. Dr. Ross has a slave named Sambo, and the question is, 'Is it the will of God that Sambo shall remain a slave or be set free?' The Almighty gives no audible answer to the question, and his revelation, the Bible, gives none—or at most none but such as admits of a squabble as to its

meaning; no one thinks of asking Sambo's opinion on it. So at last it comes to this, that Dr. Ross is to decide the question; and while he considers it, he sits in the shade, with gloves on his hands, and subsists on the bread that Sambo is earning in the burning sun. If he decides that God wills Sambo to continue a slave, he thereby retains his own comfortable position; but if he decides that God wills Sambo to be free, he thereby has to walk out of the shade, throw off his gloves and delve for his own bread. Will Dr. Ross be actuated by the perfect impartiality which has ever been considered most favourable to correct decisions?"—*Abraham Lincoln, Notes for Speeches, October, 1858.*

### 1. *The Policy of Reforms*

THE "INDIAN question" during the past quarter of a century, to judge from nine-tenths of the voluminous literature which has poured out upon the subject in British discussion, is mainly a question of the successive "constitutions" handed out at intervals by imperialism to the Indian people. In the background, as a kind of setting to the constitutional question, appears a vague fringe of "unrest" and undesirable manifestations by the people under the influence of "extremists", with some references to the enigmatic personality of Mr. Gandhi.

The various "Constitutions" or constitutional projects have been simply forms of the battle, successive stages and arenas of the battle between imperialism and nationalism. They have not even been the main stage of the battle. The reality has been the battle; the ghost has been the Constitution.

The suggestion is sometimes put forward to-day that the real purpose of British rule in India has been to train the Indian people for self-government.

This was not the view of the early British rulers of India. Until the strength of the national movement for liberation forced the issue of self-government into the political arena, any possibility of such a development was rejected by British ruling opinion with contempt.

Not only Conservative opinion, but Liberal opinion right through the classic period of British supremacy concurred in this view. Macaulay declared in 1833:

"In India you cannot have representative institutions. Of all the innumerable speculators who have offered their suggestions on Indian politics not a single one, as far as I know, however democratical his opinion, has ever maintained the possibility of giving at the present time such institutions to India."

(T. B. Macaulay, speech in the House of Commons, July 10, 1833.)

No less definite was the expression of the Liberal Lord Morley in 1908.

"If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it."

(Lord Morley, speech in the House of Lords, December 17, 1908.)

Such was the consistent standpoint of imperialism in relation to India up to 1917.

Up to the war of 1914 the proclaimed aim of imperialism was the successively extended drawing of Indians into association in the imperialist administrative machine. This aim, which is indispensable for the successful working of any imperialist system (of the 1½ million in government service in India it is practically impossible for more than a fraction to be English), has been consistently proclaimed, and, with due caution to maintain hold of all strategic positions of control, continuously pursued for over a century. The Charter of 1833 laid down:

"No Indian by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them, shall be disabled from holding any place, office or any employment under the said Government."

The Queen's Proclamation of 1858, which has been commonly presented as the starting point of a new policy, in reality only amplified the above:

"It is our will that, so far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to office in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity duly to discharge."

These pledges or promises to India of complete equality and disappearance of distinctions between rulers and ruled were not, of course, intended to be fulfilled in the broad sense in which they appeared to be made. Lord Lytton, Viceroy in 1876-80, in his "confidential" letter to the Secretary of State, Lord Cranbrook, stated:

"We all know that these claims and expectations never can or will be fulfilled. We had the choice between prohibiting them and cheating them, and we have chosen the least straightforward course. . . . This I am writing confidentially, I do not hesitate to say that both the Government of England and of India appear to me up to the present moment unable to answer satisfactorily the charge of having taken every means in their power of breaking to the heart the words of promise they have uttered to the ear."

Lord Salisbury, in his downright fashion, characterised the British pledges to India as "political hypocrisy".

Alongside the cautious widening of the number of posts held by Indians in the civil service (but never in the decisive positions), a series of reform measures were carried from 1861 onwards.

In 1861 the Indian Councils Act provided for the addition of six nominated non-official members to the Viceroy's Legislative Council; and some of these nominated members were carefully selected Indians. It is worth noting that, like every subsequent reform measure, the "reform" was accompanied by a new repressive weapon: the Viceroy was given the power to issue Ordinances having for six months at any time the force of law—a power freely used in the modern period.

In 1883-84 the Local Self-Government Acts introduced the elective principle into municipal government, and established Rural Boards and District Councils.

In 1892 the Indian Councils Act added a few indirectly elected members (actually recommended for approval, not formally elected, by the local government and other bodies) to the Provincial Legislative Councils, and through them, at a further stage of indirectness, to the Viceroy's Legislative Council.

In 1909 the Indian Councils Act, better known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, introduced an elected majority into the Provincial Legislative Councils (in part indirectly, and in part directly elected), and an elected minority (indirectly elected, except for the landowners' seats and the Moslems' seats) into the Viceroy's Legislative Council. The functions of these Councils remained severely restricted, with no control over administration or finance; their legislation could be vetoed, if disapproved; the franchise was extremely narrow, and to the existing multiplication of electing bodies was added the system of separate Moslem electorates.

The Morley-Minto Reforms were the first reforms to be carried in the midst of, and as a result of widespread national agitation and demand for self-government, and with the avowed political aim to defeat that agitation and, in Morley's phrase, "rally the Moderates". Lord Morley's calculations to defeat the movement for self-government by his Reforms were openly expressed. He analysed the situation in the following instructive terms:

"There are three classes of people whom we have to consider in dealing with a scheme of this kind. There are the Extremists who nurse fantastic dreams that some day they will drive us out of India. . . . The second group nourish no hopes of this sort, but hope for autonomy or self-government of the colonial

species and pattern. And then the third section of this classification ask for no more than to be admitted to co-operation in our administration.

"I believe the effect of the Reforms has been, is being and will be to draw the second class, who hope for colonial autonomy, into the third class, who will be content with being admitted to a fair and full co-operation."

(Viscount Morley, speech in the House of Lords, February 23, 1909.)

Up to this point the policy of imperialism is clear and unmistakable. There is no question of any advance to self-government. The interests of the Paramount Power are decisive. The purpose of constitutional reform is to enlist the support of the upper-class minority in the interests of imperialism.

Then came the war of 1914-18, the weakening of the foundations of imperialism, the awakening of India, as of all the colonial peoples, Hindu-Moslem unity and the Congress-League scheme of 1916 for self-government, and the Russian Revolution of March, 1917, opening the wave of popular advance in all countries and launching the slogans of national self-determination throughout the world.

On August 20, 1917, the British Government met this situation with a new Declaration of Policy, which has since been regarded as the keystone of modern imperialist constitutional policy. The essential passages of this Declaration ran:

"The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing the association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible. . . . Progress in this policy can only be achieved by successive stages. The British Government and the Government of India, on whom the responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian peoples, must be judges of the time and measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the co-operation received from those upon whom new opportunities of service will thus be conferred and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility."

This Declaration is generally known as the Montagu Declaration, from the name of the Secretary of State, E. S. Montagu, through whom it was issued. Its drafting was largely the work of the

veterans of Die-Hard British imperialism, Lord Curzon and Sir Austen Chamberlain.

The key to the policy was the conception of "stages" for which the British ruling authorities were to be the "judges of the time and measure of each advance". The first stage took two years to reach. This was a lightning speed compared to the second stage. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report had contemplated ten-year intervals for periodic review and revision to advance to a new stage. The second stage, however, took sixteen years to reach, with the Government of India Act of 1935 after seven years of exhaustive enquiry. The Simon Report recommended dropping of the ten-year intervals as far too short.

Two legislative measures have so far been enacted to implement the new policy.

The first, the Government of India Act of 1919, established the system known as Dyarchy. No change was made in the Central Government; but in the Provincial Governments certain subjects, such as Health, Education and similar constructive subjects for which there was no money, were "transferred" to Indian Ministers responsible to the Provincial Legislatures, while the other more strategic subjects, such as Police and Land Revenue, were "reserved" in the hands of Ministers responsible to the Governor. The Provincial Legislatures were established with a majority of elected members, on the basis of a restricted property franchise representing (apart from Burma) 2.8 per cent of the population. The Provincial Governors had power both to veto legislation and to "certify" legislation they wished adopted, if not accepted by the legislature. At the Centre two Chambers were established: a Council of State, nearly half nominated and the rest elected from the narrowest upper circle (less than 18,000 electors for the whole country); and a Legislative Assembly, with an elected majority on the basis of a franchise even more restricted than that for the Provinces (less than half of 1 per cent of the population). The Governor-General had unlimited over-riding powers to veto or certify legislation.

Dyarchy was universally condemned, not only by Indian opinion, but also after a few years' experience by ruling imperialist opinion. The "responsibility" of the Indian Ministers was admittedly a farce. The Simon Report unsparingly exposed the defects of the system, by which the Indian Ministers were in practice "largely dependent on the official bloc" and regarded as "Government men"; the "almost irresistible impulse towards a unification of Government" defeated the paper plans of divided responsibility. Indeed, nothing is more striking than the impartial justice with which each successive stage of imperialist constitution-

making has exposed the pretensions of its predecessor. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report was merciless to the illusory claims of the Morley-Minto Reforms. The Simon Report was no less unsparing in pointing out the shortcomings and failure of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The present Constitution is, however, as always, assumed to be a paragon, condemned only by the shortsightedness of Indian opinion.

The Government of India Act of 1935 represents the second constitutional enactment following that of 1919 and is the Constitution in force, since 1937 (though the main Federal section has not been brought into operation and has been indefinitely suspended since the war).

## 2. *The Present Constitution of India*

The present Constitution of India is formally based on the Government of India Act of 1935, with subsequent modifications by wartime legislation.

The Government of India Act of 1935 provided for

(1) the establishment of an All-India Federation of the Indian States (the Princes) and British India, with a Central Federal Government under the Viceroy;

(2) "Provincial Autonomy", or the establishment of Provincial Ministries, with certain restricted powers, responsible to elected Provincial Legislatures, and subject to the overriding powers of the Provincial Governors.

The Federation has not been established; and the Federal sections of the Act have never come into operation; although the Central Government partially operates under its provisions in respect of its executive powers. The central legislatures are still those established by the 1919 Constitution.

The plan for Federation was intended to draw in the despotic Princes to counterbalance the advance of democratic forces in British India. Special weighted representation was to be given to the Indian Princes in the Federal Legislature: although the population of the Indian States was one-quarter of the population of India, the Princes were to have been given two-fifths of the representation in the Upper House and one-third in the Lower. The Federal Legislature was to have been highly undemocratic: in the Upper House or Council of State, out of 260 seats only 75 were to have been "general" seats (i.e., not allocated to special sections) open to direct election from the narrowest upper-class electorate of 0.05 per cent of the population of British India; in the Lower House or Federal Assembly, out of 375 seats only 105 were to have been "general" seats open to indirect election from the Provincial Assemblies. This unrepresentative Federal Legislature was to



have had no power of control of the Central Government or of finance; defence, the civil services, police and a series of other spheres were reserved as outside its purview; any legislation it might pass might be refused assent by the Viceroy, who also had power to give the force of law to any measures it might refuse to pass. The Viceroy was given special discretionary powers to override his Ministers and the Legislature, dealt with in detail in ninety-four sections of the Act, as well as a series of reserved subjects and "special responsibilities" or "safeguards" covering every conceivable issue or situation. In short, the Federal plan of the 1935 Constitution bore not the slightest resemblance to any plan for Indian self-government.

The Provincial sections of the Act were brought into operation in 1937. Under these provisions the Provincial Legislatures were elected in 1937. On the basis of the sweeping Congress successes in these elections, despite the extremely restricted character of the electoral system, Congress Provincial Ministries were formed in seven (later, nine) of the eleven Provinces; and held office between 1937 and 1939. Their powers were limited, and were subject in principle to the same overriding powers of the Provincial Governors as those held by the Viceroy at the Centre. After the resignation of the Congress Provincial Ministries in 1939, the working of the Constitution in seven Provinces was suspended, and direct autocratic rule was resumed by the Provincial Governors.

With the war, the dictatorial powers of the Viceroy and of the Provincial Governors have been further intensified.

The present Constitution is thus based in form on (1) parts of the 1935 Constitution; (2) parts of the 1919 Constitution; (3) wartime legislation and special powers. In practice the present Constitution is an absolute dictatorship of the Viceroy and the bureaucracy, acting on behalf of and under the control of the British Government in London.

Sovereignty over India ultimately rests with the British Secretary of State for India and the British Cabinet, responsible to the British parliament. On their behalf the Viceroy or Governor-General holds supreme executive power.

The Viceroy appoints an advisory "Executive Council", enlarged in 1942 to fourteen members, eleven of whom are Indians. This inclusion of Indian nominees in official positions has nothing to do with self-government; the members are not representatives or responsible to any body of Indian opinion, but nominated by the Viceroy and hold office at his pleasure; they cannot be removed by any hostile vote of the legislature; they have no collective responsibility; the Viceroy is not bound to take their advice; supreme executive power rests with the Viceroy.

The Central Legislature, surviving from the 1919 Constitution, consists of two Chambers. The Upper House or Council of State consists of 60 members, of whom 27 are nominated by the Government, and 33 are elected by 18,000 electors for all India. The Lower House or Legislative Assembly contains 145 members, of whom 40 are nominated by the Government, and 105 are elected from communally divided electorates (only 48 being "general" seats) on the basis of a narrow restricted franchise, which in the last election in 1934 gave an electorate of 1,416,000 or less than one-half of one per cent of the population of British India. This Legislature has no real powers, and can be overridden in all issues by the Viceroy, who can refuse assent to any measure it carries, or pass any legislation at his own discretion, despite a hostile vote of the Legislature. The Viceroy can also issue Ordinances with the force of law.

The Provinces are ruled by the Provincial Governors, responsible to and controlled by the Viceroy. The Provincial Legislatures are based on a wider electorate than in the case of the Centre. Upper Chambers have been established in five leading Provinces. The Provincial Legislative Assemblies or Lower Houses are based on an electorate of 30·1 million voters, or 11 per cent of the population of British India (compared with 67 per cent of the population enfranchised in Britain). The qualification is mainly on the basis of property, taxpaying, tenancy-holding of a certain value, with an additional literacy qualification. The constituencies are split up to provide for no less than thirteen sectional or communal groupings, with extra weighting for minorities. The 1,585 seats of the 11 Provincial Legislative Assemblies are divided as follows:

General seats (open) . . . . .	657
Moslems . . . . .	482
Scheduled Castes . . . . .	151
Commerce and Industry . . . . .	56
Women . . . . .	41
Labour . . . . .	38
Landholders . . . . .	37
Sikhs . . . . .	34
Europeans . . . . .	26
Backward areas and tribes . . . . .	24
Indian Christians . . . . .	20
Anglo-Indians . . . . .	11
University . . . . .	8

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1,585

It will be seen that the "general" seats are a minority of the whole.

Provincial Ministries can be formed on the basis of the support of the Provincial Legislatures, and can function to a certain extent



of "the gradual development of self-governing institutions", British Prime Ministers and leading statesmen have repeatedly emphasised the intention of the permanent maintenance of British power in India.

Thus Mr. Lloyd George, as Prime Minister, in his famous "steel frame" speech in 1922:

"That Britain under no circumstances will relinquish her responsibility in India is a cardinal principle, not merely of the present Government, but of any Government which will command the confidence of the people in this country. . . .

"I can see no period when India can dispense with the guidance and the assistance of this small nucleus of the British Civil Service. . . . They are the steel frame of the whole structure."

(Lloyd George, in the House of Commons on August 2, 1922.)

Similarly Mr. Churchill declared in 1930:

"The British nation has no intention whatever of relinquishing effectual control of Indian life and progress.

"We have no intention of casting away that most truly bright and precious jewel in the Crown of the King, which more than all our other Dominions and Dependencies constitutes the glory and strength of the British Empire."

(Winston Churchill, speech to the Indian Empire Society, December 11, 1930.)

In no less definite language Mr. Baldwin, speaking as Prime Minister, declared in 1934:

"It is my considered judgement in all the changes and chances of this wide world to-day, that you have a good chance of keeping the whole of that sub-Continent of India in the Empire for ever."

(Stanley Baldwin, speech to the Central Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, December 4, 1934.)

"Our Viceroys and our Governors in India, and under them the Services that will be recruited by the Secretary of State and safeguarded by parliament, will have the duty and the means to ensure, if need be, that that political power is exercised by Indian Ministers and Legislatures *for the purposes that we intend.*"

(Stanley Baldwin, broadcast on the Government of India Bill, February 5, 1935—italics added.)

These repeated declarations by the principal British Prime

Ministers during the past quarter of a century reveal the tenacious resistance of the British ruling class to Indian national liberation. Nor are the reasons for this far to seek. The continued domination of India is seen as vital to the interests of the British possessing classes. In the conditions of the crumbling of the former world monopoly, with the weakening hold of British industries in the world market, and with the increasing economic and political independence of the White Dominions, the maintenance and even extension of the monopolist hold on India and the colonial empire is seen as not less essential, but more essential to British finance-capital.

Both Liberal and Conservative expression have reflected this outlook.

"There are two chief reasons why a self-regarding England may hesitate to relax her control over India. The first is that her influence in the past depends partly upon her power to summon troops and to draw resources from India in time of need. This power will vanish when India has Dominion Status. The second is that Great Britain finds in India her best market, and that she has one thousand million pounds of capital invested there."

(*Manchester Guardian Weekly*, January 3, 1930.)

This brutal statement of the "self-regarding" arguments by a leading Liberal journal is paralleled by such statements on the Conservative side as that of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab at the time of Amritsar, on "our duty to our Imperial position, to our kinsfolk in India, and to a thousand millions of British capital invested in India" (speech to the Society of Authors, quoted by Lord Olivier in the *Manchester Guardian* of March 12, 1925), or of Lord Rothermere in the *Daily Mail* on May 16, 1930, that "many authorities estimate that the proportion of the vital trading, banking and shipping business of Britain directly dependent upon our connection with India is 20 per cent. . . . India is the lynch-pin of the British Empire. If we lose India the Empire must collapse—first economically, then politically."

India is the pivot of the British Empire. As the last outstanding Viceroy of still expanding imperialism in India, Lord Curzon, wrote in 1894 (before his Viceroyalty):

"Just as De Tocqueville remarked that the conquest and government of India are really the achievements which have given to England her place in the opinion of the world, so it is the prestige and the wealth arising from her Asiatic position that are the foundation stones of the British Empire. There, in the heart of the old Asian continent, she sits upon the throne

that has always ruled the East. Her sceptre is outstretched over land and sea. 'God-like', she 'grasps the triple fork, and, king-like, wears the crown'."

(Hon. G. N. Curzon, "Problems of the Far East", 1894, p. 419.)

Four years later, in 1898, he was sounding a new note:

"India is the pivot of our Empire. . . . If the Empire loses any other part of its Dominion we can survive, but if we lose India the sun of our Empire will have set."

The economic and financial significance of India to Britain, and to the whole development and structure of British capitalism, has played a predominant part in the historical record, and, even though now weakening, is still very great. The old monopoly of the Indian market, reaching to over four-fifths in the nineteenth century and to two-thirds even on the eve of the war of 1914, has now vanished never to return; since 1929 India is no longer the largest single market for British goods, and had fallen to third place in 1938. But the lion's share of Indian trade, of a nation advancing to 400 millions, is still in British hands (nearly one-third of Indian imports and over one-third of Indian exports). The volume of British capital holdings in India has been estimated at £1,000 million (estimate of the Associated Chambers of Commerce in India in 1933), or one-quarter of the total of British overseas capital investments. The value of the annual tribute drawn from India to Britain, in one form or another, has been estimated at £150 million (calculation based on the year 1921-22, in Shah and Khambata, "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India", p. 234), or more than the total of the entire Indian Budget at the same date, and equivalent to over £3 a year per head of the population in Britain, or nearly £1,700 a year for every supertax-payer in Britain at the time of the estimate.

No less important is the strategic significance of India to British imperialism, both as the basis from which the further expansion of the Empire has been in great part undertaken, the exchequer and source of troops for innumerable overseas wars and expeditions, and also as the centre-point to which strategic calculations (control of the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Middle Eastern Empire, and Singapore) have been continuously directed.

The concentration of British world strategy around the pivot of the domination of India can be traced with increasing clearness through the past two centuries. The eighteenth-century wars of Britain and France revolved primarily, not so much around the kaleidoscope of the shifting European constellations which

appeared as their immediate cause, but around the struggle for the New World and for the domination of India. The loss of the United States increased the importance of India. When Napoleon directed his expeditions to Egypt and the Near East, he had before him visions of the advance to India. Through the nineteenth century Russia appeared as the bogey extending ever farther over Asia and threatening India. When Britain abandoned isolation at the beginning of the twentieth century, the first step in this new orientation of policy was the alliance with Japan, and the revised Anglo-Japanese Treaty, when it was renewed, contained the formula for Japanese assistance in maintaining British domination in India. The conflict with Germany turned especially on the control of the Middle East, opening up the way to India.

India has throughout provided the inexhaustible reservoir for Britain, alike of material and of human resources; not only for its own conquest, but for the whole policy of Asiatic expansion. Wars were conducted on this basis in Afghanistan, Burma, Siam, China, Persia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt and Abyssinia.

Closely intertwined with the economic and strategic significance of India for Britain is the social-political significance of the control and exploitation of India for the whole structure and character of internal social and political relations in Britain. The conflict between empire and democracy runs like a continuous thread through the modern history of England.

From the conquest of India in the middle of the eighteenth century this strand of the direct influence of empire on British internal politics can be continuously traced. The influence of the "nabobs" on the corruption of eighteenth-century politics and of the pre-Reform Parliament is notorious. The Reform Ministry of Fox in 1783 was defeated over India, and gave place to the long rule of reaction, the tenacious counter-revolutionary hostility to the French Revolution and the postponement of democratic reform in England. When the Reform Bill of 1832 replaced the old ascendancy by the nineteenth-century domination of Lancashire, it was the rôle of trading and manufacturing interests in the exploitation of India that played no small part in frustrating the aspirations of nineteenth-century Liberalism and guiding it along the path which led to its outcome in Liberal Imperialism. From the camp of the Anglo-Indian rulers, trained in the methods of despotic domination, have been continuously recruited the forces of reaction in British internal politics, from the days of a Curzon to the days of a Lloyd. In the rifts within Conservatism the close connection between Indians and the Die-Hards can be continuously traced.

Not only within the ranks of the ruling class, but within the ranks of the working class this same influence of empire holds the main responsibility for retarding the advance and weakening the independence of the British Labour Movement. Therefore the fresh and powerful current of Chartism, leading the world working class in the struggle for class liberation, and openly espousing the cause of the colonial peoples, gave place to the ignominious nineteenth-century compromise of the upper sections of the working class following docilely at the tails of their masters and sharing the spoils of colonial exploitation.

Even in the modern period, when the basis of this domination is crumbling and the consequent apparent gains to a section of the workers are vanishing, the statesmen of imperialism still try to hold out the profits of empire as indispensable to the interests of the British working class and the British people. Thus the argument has been put forward that the maintenance of Empire trade and investments is essential for the livelihood of the British people:

"There are fifteen million more people here than can exist without our enormous external connections, without our export trade which is now halved, without our shipping which is so largely paralysed, without the income of our foreign investments, which are taxed to sustain our social services. I suppose that two millions or three millions in these islands get their livelihood from beneficent services mutually interchanged between us and India."

(Winston Churchill, speech in the House of Commons, March 29, 1933.)

"India has quite a lot to do with the wage-earners of Britain. The Lancashire cotton operatives have found that out all right. One hundred thousand of them are on the dole already, and if we lose India, if we had the same treatment from a Home Rule India as we have had to our sorrow from a Home Rule Ireland, it would be more like two million breadwinners in this country who would be tramping the streets and queuing up at the Labour Exchanges."

(Winston Churchill, broadcast on India, January 29, 1935.)

But the whole experience of the modern period has proved the falsity of this argument. For the sake of the crumbs of a dwindling and doomed monopoly the British workers are called on to forego their birthright to freedom, and to ally themselves with a despotic system against the subject peoples. The outcome of this policy is not prosperity, but ruin. This has been proved in hard practice



in recent years. Freedom has not been granted to India ; but this did not prevent the two million breadwinners in Britain queuing up at the Labour Exchanges.

To-day the whole basis of the old Empire domination is crumbling. The illusions which were built upon it are falling to the ground. The old nineteenth-century monopoly is doomed and can never be recovered. The maintenance of domination in India has reaped a harvest of hostility of the Indian people which is to-day endangering, not only the defence of India, but the defence of the British people and the freedom of the British people. A new path must be found which shall open the way to the equal co-operation of both peoples on the basis of freedom, for the mutual benefit of both nations.

# PART FOUR

## THE BRITISH PEOPLE AND INDIA

### CHAPTER XIV

## THE COMMON INTERESTS OF THE BRITISH AND INDIAN PEOPLES

"In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free."—*Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862.*

"I say there is room enough for us all to be free, and that it not only does not wrong the white man that the negro should be free, but it positively wrongs the mass of the white men that the negro should be enslaved."—*Abraham Lincoln, speech at Cincinnati, September 17, 1859.*

### 1. *Permanent Common Interests of the Two Peoples*

THE DOMINATION of India was never in the true interests of the British people. The gains from the tribute and exploitation of India, the profits of trade and investment, the highly paid posts and pensions and sinecures, have enriched a tiny section of the nation; but that enrichment has only increased the power of reaction and wealth against the masses of the nation. The rôle of the Anglo-Indian Nabobs and of Die-Hard Toryism in British politics have abundantly illustrated the truth of this. The crumbs and droppings of the spoils obtained by the propertied classes from the plunder of India might fall to their retainers and a small upper section of the skilled workers or privileged labour aristocracy; but the price of this short-lived gain of a section was the degradation and deeper enslavement of the mass of the working class and the poisoning and corruption of the labour movement.

The Chartist pioneers of British democracy and the British Labour Movement well understood the truth of this, and unhesitatingly took their stand against the policies of colonial domination and for the freedom of all subject peoples. Thus the Manifesto of the Fraternal Democrats in 1846:

"There is no foot of land, either in Britain or the Colonies, that you, the working class, can call your own. . . . They, your masters, will take the land—they will fill all the higher situations, civil and military, of the new colonies—your share will be the slaughter of the combat and the cost of winning and retaining the conquest. The actual settlers on and cultivators of the soil, these are the rightful sovereigns of the soil, and should be

at perfect liberty to choose their own form of government and their own institutions."

(*Northern Star*, March 7, 1846.)

Marx repeatedly emphasised the conclusion to which his studies of the problems of the British working class and democratic movement had brought him, that progress in Britain imperatively required the liberation of the subject nations under British rule. He wrote, with special reference to Ireland, which then typified the colonial question:

"Quite independent of any 'international' and 'humanitarian' talk about 'justice for Ireland' . . . it is the direct and absolute interest of the British working class to break the present connection with Ireland. . . . The British working class can do nothing until it rids itself of Ireland. . . . The reaction in Britain has its roots in the enslavement of Ireland."

(Marx, letter to Engels, December 10, 1869.)

Similarly the resolution of the General Council of the First International in 1869, adopted with the co-operation of the leading representatives of British Trade Unionism, declared:

"The essential preliminary condition of the emancipation of the English working class is the turning of the present compulsory union, that is, slavery, of Ireland with England, into an equal and free union, if that is possible, or into full separation, if this is inevitable."

Herein was expressed the essential principle of the approach of the working-class and progressive movement to the colonial question, and to all questions of the domination of subject peoples.

The pioneers of the modern socialist and labour movement in Britain, Hyndman, Keir Hardie, Tom Mann and others, were all champions of Indian liberation, and devoted a considerable proportion of their political activity to exposing the consequences of British rule in India and awakening support for the cause of Indian national freedom.

The liberal-labour movement of the later nineteenth century, whose traditions have been continued in the official policy of leading sections of the labour movement in the twentieth century, acquiesced in and even supported the colonial policy of the ruling class. This tendency was unfortunately carried forward in the reactionary record of the two Labour Governments in relation to India, under which arrests and imprisonments reached record heights, and in various pronouncements which have been made from time to time by the National Council of Labour in relation to the Indian question, supporting official policy and repressive

measures in India and criticising the Indian national movement. This line of support for the forcible maintenance of British domination in India has reflected the traditional outlook of the privileged labour aristocracy which sought to maintain a sheltered position on the basis of empire exploitation.

But the falsity of this outlook has been abundantly demonstrated in the modern period, when the crumbling of the former world monopoly of British capitalism has brought with it the collapse of the sheltered position of former privileged sections—most powerfully shown in the fate of the Lancashire cotton operatives. This has exposed the bankruptcy of a policy which sought to build prosperity on the assumption of the uninterrupted continuance of empire domination and exploitation.

In this way the lessons of experience of the modern period have driven home the necessity of finding a new basis of the free and equal relations of the British and Indian peoples, to the mutual benefit of both. The old empire basis is doomed. The attempt to continue it, with the weapons of coercion and repression against the rising hostility of the subject peoples, can only lead to increasing isolation and peril for the British people. It can only lead to continuous economic worsening, and even the prospect of economic catastrophe, if the source of livelihood is still sought to be found from the unpaid tribute of the subject peoples or the forced and unequal exchange between the exploiting metropolis and the exploited colonies.

On the other hand, the path of national liberation of India and the subject peoples holds out a new and favourable perspective for the British people. Indian national liberation would remove the burdens and barriers which at present hold the Indian people down on the lowest level in the world scale. It would open the way to progressive social advance, the raising of the standard of living of four hundred millions, and the inauguration of the vast and long overdue works of technical and industrial reconstruction which a National Government would attempt. This would, inevitably have favourable repercussions on the economic situation of the British people, as on the standards of the whole world. It would open the way to fruitful productive relations, on the basis of equality and friendship, alongside co-operation and mutual strengthening in the maintenance of democracy and world peace.

The example of the U.S.S.R. during the past quarter of a century has shown the practical path of solution of the national problem on the basis of the complete liberation and equality of the many nationalities formerly subject to Tsarism, with the final abolition of all distinction of ruling and subject nations, and with free help (not loans at interest) from the more advanced to

the more backward nations to enable them to develop with the greatest possible speed to the technical and cultural level of the most advanced. This experience has shown how such a policy of national liberation and equality, so far from being utopian, is the only practical policy, and has forged unbreakable bonds of friendship in place of former antagonisms.

## 2. *Common Interests in the Fight against Fascism*

If the liberation of India has always corresponded to the real interests of the British people, and with increasing emphasis during recent years, the present war situation has made this question more clear and urgent than ever before. It has exposed with new sharpness the evils of the continued enslavement of India. It has laid bare for all to see the imperative necessity of ending this enslavement now in order to make possible the free co-operation of India in the common struggle which faces all nations to-day.

The contradiction between a world war of liberation against Fascism, for the liberation of the nations enslaved by Fascism, and the simultaneous maintenance of the enslavement of India is a glaring contradiction which weakens the cause of the peoples and is a blow in the face of the world front of the peoples against Fascism. The Atlantic Charter laid down as the pledged policy of the British and American Governments, later adhered to by all the United Nations:

"They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them."

In a speech immediately following the publication of the Atlantic Charter, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, emphasised that "coloured peoples as well as white will share the benefits of the Churchill-Roosevelt Atlantic Charter", and added:

"You will not find in any of the declarations which have been made on behalf of the Government of this country on the war any suggestion that the freedom and social security for which we fight should be denied to any of the races of mankind."

But on September 9th, 1941, the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, in an official statement on behalf of the Government specifically excluded "India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire" from the operation of the Atlantic Charter, and explained:

"At the Atlantic meeting we had in mind primarily the restoration of the sovereignty, self-government and natural life of the States and nations of Europe now under the Nazi yoke."

This rejection of the Indian national demand, at the very moment when Indian national liberation is imperative for the most effective mobilisation of the Indian people for defence and for participation in the common struggle, is the root cause of the present crisis. The present crisis in the relations of Britain and India, at the moment when the interests of the two nations should be most closely united, is the harvest of years of reactionary policy now reaching to a fateful climax. This harvest is bringing immeasurable dangers to the world cause of the fight for freedom against Fascism.

The experience of the war in the Far East has shown that the battle against Japanese aggression cannot be effectively waged only by foreign imported imperialist forces, which are divorced from the friendly support or fighting reserves of the population of the countries attacked, and which are therefore compelled to treat the territories and nations of Eastern Asia as only theatres of war or spoils of conquest. This strategy only plays into the hands of the Japanese and their deceitful propaganda of "Asia for the Asiatics" (meaning "Asia for the Japanese War Lords"). Nor can the man-power and resources and popular enthusiasm of these countries be mobilised or organised by a colonial bureaucracy, without roots or permanent home in the country, and created and designed for an entirely different purpose, for the maintenance of a system of exploitation and for repressing any popular movement, and not for any major constructive tasks, for which they have already shown themselves incapable in peacetime.

This lesson has been driven home successively by the experience of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, Java, Borneo and Burma. The classic exposition of this lesson was given by the dispatch of *The Times* special correspondent in the Far East on "Why Singapore Fell", which was published in February, 1942:

"The Government had no roots in the life of the people of the country. With the exception of certain sections of the Chinese community—some inspired by Free China's struggle for survival, others by Soviet precept and example—the bulk of the Asiatic population remained spectators from start to finish. . . .

"The absence of forceful leadership made itself felt from the top downwards. . . . The same lack of dynamism, of aggressive energy, characterised the upper ranks of the civilian administration. Perhaps it is impossible to retain these qualities after a lifetime spent in the easy-going routine of colonial administration. . . .

"Singapore had a civilian population of 700,000 people. Unlike Moscow, the bulk of this population were apathetic

spectators of a conflict which they felt did not concern them.

"This caused acute difficulties in the field of labour. Bomb-craters on airfields were not filled up because no Asiatics, and not enough Europeans, were available for work. Early on in the war, of the labour force of 12,000 Asiatics employed at the naval base, only 800 were reporting for duty. There was no native labour at the docks. Soldiers had to be taken away from military duties to load and unload ships. Many small ships and launches that could have brought many thousands of people away from Singapore were anchored out in the harbour; but they never sailed because the native crews had deserted and there were not enough Europeans to man and stoke them."

(*Times*, February 18, 1942.)

Such was the exposure of the colonial system, no longer in the complacent pages of blue books or self-congratulatory reports to parliament, but in the stern ordeal of war. "Against this structure, the military and civilian weaknesses of which have been indicated," *The Times* correspondent concludes, the first assault of the Japanese offensive meant that "one good push has sent the structure crashing to the ground". Yet this lesson was to be repeated in the East Indies and in Burma, and has not yet been learnt for India.

The front against Japan in the Far East has been weak or strong precisely in proportion to the degree of mobilisation and co-operation of the population inhabiting the regions attacked, and that co-operation has been proportionate to the degree of freedom they have won. Thus the fully colonial territories, like Malaya, Singapore, Java, Borneo and Burma, have collapsed most rapidly before the Japanese advance. With this may be contrasted the relatively more protracted resistance in the Philippines, where a large measure of self-government had been granted, with an elected Filipino President, Cabinet and elected National Assembly, and a fixed date for complete independence by 1945; where conscription and general military training of the population had been established before the war; and where "the Filipinos have outshone every military hope and have fought with Americans like blood-brothers". (*Daily Herald*, February 7, 1942.)

The power of national independence to inspire and mobilise a people to fight in their own defence has been shown for all time by the heroic example and leadership of Free China. In the face of a thousand obstacles and shortage of arms, equipment or developed productive resources, the Chinese National Republic is now in the sixth year of unbroken and united resistance to the

apanese assault. They have held the front against the main bulk of the Japanese armies, at the same time as first-class imperialist armies were going down like ninepins before a considerably smaller proportion of the Japanese forces. After having been at the mercy of every rapacious Power in the past, and the supposed predestined victim of partition, China under its National Government has won its rightful position of equal partnership among the leading four Powers at the head of the United Nations. After having been subjected to every rebuff and boycott at the hands of representatives of Britain and the United States in the early years of their struggle, at a time when the British Empire and the United States were providing the main bulk of the supplies for Japanese armaments, they have now turned the tables to such an extent that they have sent trained soldiers to the relief of British and Australian forces in distress, and may yet have to play a crucial part in relation to the defence of India.

These are the plain and inescapable lessons of the war in the Far East which now point the way for the supreme and decisive test of India.

*Shall India travel the Malaya road or the road of Free China? This is the heart of the issue in relation to India to-day.*

The alliance of Free China and Free India must be the cornerstone of freedom and the fight for freedom in Eastern Asia. This is the political-military-strategic key to victory over the Axis in Asia and to the whole future in Asia.

What will a Free India mean as an ally of the United Nations?

First, it will mean the immediate strengthening of the defence of India, by the full mobilisation, support and co-operation of the population, in place of the present passivity, suspicion, obstruction or conflict; the bringing into play of reserves at present unused; and the formation of popular forces and levies (even if mainly of a guerilla type and under-armed at first, but capable of rapid development under war conditions) to fight alongside the allied forces in the defence of India.

Second, it will mean thereby the possibility to bar the road to the Axis conquest of India, not merely by the precarious barrier of a handful of imperialist forces which may be overpowered and withdrawn, as in so many other regions of Eastern Asia, but by the united and unbreakable resistance of a nation of four hundred millions fighting for their freedom with the same spirit as the Chinese are fighting; and thus to remove the menace which the Axis conquest of India would mean for the whole future of the war.

Third, it will mean thereby the release of allied forces for other fronts (even the release of forces at present used for repression would be important), so that the solution of the Indian issue



would have the most direct bearing on facilitating the conditions for the establishment and maintenance of the Second Front in Europe.

Fourth, it will mean the enormous strengthening of the liberation appeal of the cause of the United Nations to all the peoples of Asia, including those at present under the Japanese yoke.

Fifth, it will mean the very practical strengthening of the reserves and resources of the world front against Fascism, by the release of the powerful reserves of potential man-power, resources and productive power which India represents, but which only a liberated India under a National Government enjoying the confidence of the people can effectively release.

India represents a vast reservoir of man-power and resources on the side of freedom which is at present barely tapped. The very great reserves of potential man-power, resources and productive power of India are at present largely unimobilised and unused under the existing system, which distrusts and fears the Indian people, opposes popular initiative and throttles any large-scale development.

This is strikingly shown in relation to man-power. The Indian army so far raised amounts to between one and one and a half million men out of a population of nearly four hundred millions; recruitment is limited; masses are turned away from the recruiting offices.

"There is no lack of men; since the outbreak of war recruiting offices all over the country have been congested with volunteers from every class, community and occupation to such an extent that it soon became impossible to deal with their numbers."

("India at War": Government Report, 1941.)

In proportion to population the man-power would provide twice the armed forces of the Soviet Union. On the Canadian scale of recruitment, it would provide 15 to 20 millions. The Nehru plan was for the immediate organisation of an army of 5 millions, with preliminary training to extend to 100 millions. China has mobilised 20 millions. But in India to-day the actual outcome is one-quarter of one per cent of the population, or a total less than that of a secondary European State. Even this figure has been stated to be "largely a paper figure. Arms are lacking for the training of a mass army, and as a result recruiting, until recently, was rather discouraged" (Military Correspondent of the *Observer*, March 8, 1942). The Chinese example has shown the possibility, under national leadership, of organising and training armies even with limited resources, capable of meeting the Japanese armies; but the Chinese Command's offer to send

military instructors to India to assist in solving the problem of training has not so far been accepted.

Similarly in respect of resources and war production. The widely publicised optimistic official statements about Indian war production, proclaiming that "India is producing 20,000 out of 40,000 items of ordnance stores", ignore the fact that the list of items actually produced consists largely of forks, spoons, hair combs, mess tins, etc., and does not include planes, tanks or heavy artillery.

It has been already shown (see Chapter III) that India has abundant resources of all the key raw materials for war production, with the exception of nickel, molybdenum and vanadium. But only the tiniest fraction is utilised. With coal reserves of 36,000 million tons, the annual production before the war reached 25 million tons, or one-tenth of the British level; and coal output dropped in 1940. With iron ore reserves of 3,000 million tons, the output of steel on the eve of war was not yet 1 million tons, or one-thirteenth of the British level, and below the level of pre-war Poland. By 1941 steel output had advanced to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million tons: "the expansion might have been larger, but . . . we are large importers of pig iron from India. It would have meant absorbing in India pig iron which was urgently needed for our industry here" (the Duke of Devonshire, Under-Secretary for India, in the House of Lords, February 3, 1942). Thus shipping, urgently needed for war transport between Britain and the Far East, is used to transport pig iron from India to Britain and finished steel back to India, rather than manufacture in India.

Up to the present there has been no development of motor industry or aero-engine industry: India is dependent on overseas supplies for all its heavy weapons: planes, tanks and heavy artillery. Yet India with industrial development could have been the arsenal of the war in the Far East. The Government announced in the House of Commons on October 9, 1941, that the manufacture of internal-combustion engines in India would not be "a practical proposition so far as the present war is concerned". By the spring of 1942, after two and a half years of war, it was announced that an exploratory commission was being appointed "to examine the question of production of components of internal-combustion engines or complete engines". Indian industrialists have vociferously complained that, in contrast to the gigantic industrial development in the Dominions since the war, industrial development in India has received a setback.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus the speech of the President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, Sir Badridas Goenka, in May, 1941—after twenty months of war:

"After describing economic conditions in countries like Canada and

The gigantic available man-power for war production is thus scarcely used. Despite the inexhaustible resources of raw materials for industrial production, and the inexhaustible reserves of man-power, not 1 per cent of the population is employed in factories, mines, railways or docks. It was reported as an achievement in November, 1941, that 50,000 workers were then employed in the Government Ordnance Factories, or one in 8,000 of the population. In September, 1942, it was announced that 123 (one hundred and twenty-three) Indian workers had returned to India from industrial training in England under the Bevin scheme. And meanwhile the authorities here wring their hands over the problem of man-power.

Thus the present policy in India means the failure to mobilise gigantic available resources on the side of freedom against Fascism—at a time when every resource is needed for a desperate struggle and the fate of the world is in the balance.

What stands in the way?

Not the lack of will of the Indian people to play their part in the common struggle. The Indian people; through their accredited national leaders, and through the leaders of every political section, demand their national freedom now in order that they may mobilise their full strength and resources as an equal ally of the United Nations.

The common interests of the British and Indian peoples in the present world battle are plain and unmistakable.

The main obstacle is the reactionary policy which still resists Indian freedom, even at the risk of thereby opening the gates to Japan; which would rather surrender the control of India to the Japanese militarists than to the Indian people; and which opposes the demand of the Indian people to be an equal ally of the United Nations.

This is the unhappy chapter in the recent relations of Britain and India whose record we must now trace, in order to seek to find the path forward to a solution, for the mutual benefit of the Indian and British peoples in the present urgent world situation.

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Australia, and contrasting them with the situation in India, Sir Badridas said that while there had been an all-round improvement in industrial and business activity in those countries, conditions in India had suffered a setback."

(*Calcutta Statesman*, May 23, 1941.)

With this may be compared the judgement of the semi-official journal *Great Britain and the East* and the *American Pacific Affairs*, quoted on pages 26-27.

## THE PRESENT CRISIS IN INDIA

"Asked how many Indians supported the Government of India, he answered: 'I would say, none.'"—*Sir Feroz Khan Noon, Defence Member of the Viceroy's Council, in a press interview, September 13, 1942.*

1. *India and the War*

THE INDIAN people through their national leaders declared their opposition to Fascism and their alignment with the democratic and progressive forces of the world against Fascism long before the outbreak of the present war.

Already in 1936, at a time when the British and French Governments were supporting "non-intervention" in relation to the German-Italian war of aggression against Spanish Democracy, the Indian National Congress was proclaiming at its session at Faizpur in December, 1936:

"Fascist aggression has increased, the Fascist Powers forming alliances and grouping themselves together for war with the intention of dominating Europe and the world and crushing political and social freedom. The Congress is fully conscious of the necessity of facing this world menace in co-operation with the progressive nations and the peoples of the world."

In February, 1938, the Haripura session declared for support of "collective security" and condemned the policies of complicity with fascist aggression which were bringing nearer the menace of war. The Tripuri session in the spring of 1939 explicitly disassociated India from the Munich policy:

"The Congress records its entire disapproval of the British foreign policy culminating in the Munich Pact, the Anglo-Italian Agreement and the recognition of Rebel Spain. This policy has been one of deliberate betrayal of democracy, repeated breaches of pledges, the ending of the system of collective security, and co-operation with Governments which are avowed enemies of democracy and freedom. . . . The Congress disassociates itself entirely from the British foreign policy which has consistently aided Fascist Powers and helped the destruction of democratic countries."

Solidarity was proclaimed during these years with the struggles of the Abyssinian, Spanish and Chinese peoples; Medical Missions were sent to Spain and to China; the Indian National Congress was affiliated to the International Peace Campaign; in 1938 a boycott was proclaimed against Japanese goods.

When war broke out between Britain and Germany in September, 1939, and India was declared a belligerent without consultation, the Indian National Congress in its resolution of September 15, 1939, re-affirmed its opposition to Nazism and Fascism and support for democracy, but demanded a clear statement of aims from the British Government, whether it was fighting for imperialist aims or democratic aims:

"If the war is to defend the status quo, imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests and privilege, then India can have nothing to do with it. If, however, the issue is democracy, then India is intensely interested in it. The Committee are convinced that the interests of Indian democracy do not conflict with the interests of British democracy or of world democracy. . . .

"If Great Britain fights for the maintenance and extension of democracy, then she must necessarily end imperialism in her own possessions, establish full democracy in India, and the Indian people must have the right of self-determination. . . . A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression. . . .

"The Working Committee, therefore, invite the British Government to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present. Do they include the elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people?"

The negative reply of the Viceroy to this approach (refusing any explicit declaration of war aims as premature, "unwise" and "impracticable", and offering only a "consultative group" to be associated with the Government) led to the resignation of all the Congress Ministries in October, 1939. In the spring of 1940 the Congress, meeting at Ramgarh, declared its view that "the recent pronouncements made on behalf of the British Government in regard to India demonstrate that Great Britain is carrying on the war fundamentally for imperialist ends. . . . Under these circumstances it is clear that the Congress cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, be a party to the war."

In the summer of 1940, following the Nazi advance in Europe, the collapse of France, and the deepening crisis of the war, the Congress made a new offer of co-operation, conditional on the recognition of Indian independence and the establishment of "a provisional National Government at the centre, which, though

formed as a transitory measure, should be such as to command the confidence of all elected members in the Central Legislature. . . . If these measures are adopted, it will enable the Congress to throw in its full weight in the efforts for the effective organisation of the defence of the country." This offer, which entailed the explicit rejection of Gandhi's line of non-violence in relation to external defence, was carried by a two-thirds majority at Poona in July, 1940. The voting showed 91 to 63 for the rejection of non-violence, and 95 to 47 for the offer of conditional co-operation.

Once again, however, this offer met with a negative reply from the British Government. The Viceroy's statement of August 8, 1940 (commonly referred to as "the August Offer", and constituting the basis of the subsequent Cripps Plan and other statements of policy up to the present date), declared that the British Government "could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life"—i.e., that the Moslem League and Princes should be empowered to veto the formation of any Indian National Government. As an alternative, it proposed: (1) the post-war establishment of "a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life in order to devise the framework of the new Constitution"; (2) the enlargement of the Viceroy's Executive Council by the inclusion of additional nominated Indians; (3) the appointment of a "War Advisory Council" of representatives of the Indian States and other Indians.

The unsatisfactory character of this reply led the Congress to adopt an individual civil disobedience campaign, under the leadership of Gandhi, which was inaugurated in October, 1940. Extensive arrests and imprisonments followed in the succeeding months (12,000 in the United Provinces alone by May 24, 1941, according to an official statement, and estimated to have reached 20,000 for all India, including 398 members of Provincial Legislative Assemblies or one-quarter of the total membership of those Assemblies, 31 ex-Ministers and 22 members of the Central Legislature).

Such was the situation of deadlock when the events of the latter half of 1941, the German attack on the Soviet Union; the British-Soviet Pact, the extension of the British-Soviet alliance into the alliance of the United Nations under the leadership of Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and China, and the Japanese attack in the Far East brought a profound change in the character of the war.

Indian national opinion was quick to respond to this trans-

formation of the war and its significance for India. As Jawaharlal Nehru declared in December, 1941:

"The progressive forces of the world are now aligned with the group represented by Russia, Britain, America and China."

Similarly the Bombay Provincial Trades Union Congress adopted a resolution in December, 1941, declaring:

"The war which the Soviet Union and Great Britain are jointly waging against Hitler-Fascism with the assistance of the U.S.A. is one and indivisible, and can no longer be regarded by the working class or the people of India as an imperialist war to which they could afford to take a neutral or hostile attitude.

"The All-India Trade Union Congress can no longer pursue the policy of hostility or non-co-operation or neutrality towards the war efforts of even the present Government. We must vigorously and boldly tell the workers that this war of the Soviet peoples and of the British people is our war as well. It is a war which the people have to win in their own interests. We want the war effort to be increased a thousandfold."

The All-India Peasants' Organisation, or Kisan Sabha, declared through a statement of its leader, N. G. Ranga, in the same month:

"The Indian peasants associate themselves whole-heartedly with the Allies in their fight against the Fascist Powers, but declare that their material and whole-hearted support will be greater and more effective if the freedom of India and other dependencies is conceded."

Thus a new path opened out, alike for the Indian national movement and for the British Government, to find the basis of co-operation of the two nations in the common tasks of the world alliance against Fascism. Not all sections of the national movement adopted at once such a clear-cut and positive response to the changed character of the war as in the expressions quoted. Some sections still followed the "non-violent" pacifist outlook of Gandhi. Others were suspicious of any co-operation with British imperialism. But the main responsible leadership of the national movement, represented by the President of the Congress, Maulana Azad, and the Secretary, Jawaharlal Nehru, with majority support, sought to find the basis of co-operation as an equal ally of the United Nations. It was clearly in the interests of Britain and the United Nations to endeavour to reach a basis of agreement with these forces. Thus a favourable situation confronted the British

Government, from the second half of 1941, provided there was readiness to meet the new situation in a new spirit.

The first reaction of the British Government was negative. Although the Atlantic Charter in August had proclaimed "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live", the Prime Minister's statement in September specifically excluded India from its operation (see page 164). This rebuff angered Indian national opinion, and strengthened the hostile forces.

Nevertheless, the Government's release of the principal Congress leaders in December, 1941, represented a first step which opened the way to the possibility of a new orientation and the advance to a basis of co-operation.

By the end of December, 1941, the Bardoli resolution of the National Congress (ratified in January, 1942) declared for the principle of armed resistance to the Axis as an ally of the United Nations, provided India could mobilise under a National Government. The resolution stated:

"While there has been no change in British policy towards India, the Committee must nevertheless take into consideration the new world situation which has arisen by the developments of the war and its approach to India. The sympathies of Congress must inevitably lie with the peoples who are subject to aggression and are fighting for their freedom; but only a free and independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis."

Following the adoption of this resolution, Gandhi was relieved of leadership of the National Congress, because of his disagreement with the abandonment of non-violence.

The *Times of India* commented on the resolution:

"The resolution reopens the door to agreement with the British Government, thereby giving a valuable lead which we hope will be reciprocated."

The way was open, given only a minimum of statesmanship and favourable response from the side of Britain.

This favourable opening was further assisted by the visit in February, 1942, of Marshal Chiang Kai Shek to India, with his simultaneous public appeal to India and to Britain (see page 9). He emphasised to Indian opinion that there was "no middle course" between "the two camps of aggression and anti-aggression." To Britain he made the plea to give "as speedily as possible real political power" to the people of India in order to enable them to participate with full strength in the war.



It will be noted that he urged "real political power" for the Indian people to enable them to strengthen their participation in the war, i.e., as a war measure, not as a post-war promise. This viewpoint corresponded to that of the Indian national movement.

Similarly, the Australian Minister for External Affairs expressed the same viewpoint in February, 1942, urging self-government for India *now during the war* in order to strengthen Indian participation in the war:

"We sympathise with the aspirations of the Indian people to become one of the self-governing nations, *and as such to take part in the defence of the Allied cause in Asia.*"

(Dr. H. V. Evatt, Australian Commonwealth Minister for External Affairs, speech in the Australian Parliament, February 27, 1942.)

On February 22, 1942, President Roosevelt explicitly declared that the Atlantic Charter applied to "the whole world" (thus tacitly correcting Mr. Churchill's statement of September, 1941, quoted on page 164):

"The Atlantic Charter applies not only to the parts of the world that border the Atlantic, but to the whole world."

(President Roosevelt, broadcast, February 22, 1942.)

It is important to recognise this rôle of American-Australian-Chinese pressure in order to understand the context of the Indian national demand and the relative isolation within the United Nations of the British official viewpoint which still rejected a responsible National Government in India during the war.

By the spring of 1942 a favourable situation had thus been created. The ball was at Britain's feet. If there was still reluctance and resistance from British official quarters, the arrival of the Japanese at Rangoon in March helped to supply the necessary impetus.

On March 8 Rangoon fell.

On March 11 the Cripps Mission to India was announced.

## 2. The Cripps Mission

The Cripps Mission to India from March 23 to April 11, 1942, was the turning-point in the present crisis of British-Indian relations, and the starting-point of the deterioration which has followed. It is therefore of vital importance to reach a clear judgement as to what was at issue, and the reasons for the breakdown, especially as sharp polemics and contradictory statements have been made by the protagonists on both sides as to some of the details of the negotiations. Nevertheless, the main facts stand out

with perfect clearness from the official documents and statements on both sides.

The Cripps Plan, or constitutional proposals for India drafted by the British War Cabinet and brought by Sir Stafford Cripps to India to discuss with Indian political leaders as a basis for a settlement, consisted of two main parts:

(1) *Post-War Proposals:*

(a) Dominion Status for "a new Indian Union";  
(b) a "constitution-making body" to be set up immediately after the war, partly elected by the membership of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies to be elected after the war, on a basis of proportional representation, and partly nominated by the Princes in proportion to the population of their States, to frame a new Constitution for India;

(c) right of any Province of British India to remain outside, and either continue on the present basis or frame a new Constitution as a separate Dominion with equal rights;

(d) Treaty between Britain and the "constitution-making body" to "make provision, in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities".

(2) *Immediate Proposals during the War:*

Retention of power by Britain, with consultative co-operation of Indian representatives.

The last point—the refusal of a wartime National Government with powers—is the crucial point of the proposals and caused the breakdown.

It will be seen that the Cripps Plan, despite the skilful press publicity given to it as a new and epoch-making offer, represented no basic change of policy, but repeated the familiar lines of the "August Offer" of the Viceroy in 1940, which had already been rejected by all sections of Indian opinion. The semi-official historian of the Cripps Mission admits the truth of this:

"The Draft Declaration did not represent a drastic change of policy. . . . In principle, in fact, the Draft Declaration went no further than the 'August Offer'."

(Professor R. Coupland, "The Cripps Mission", Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 30.)

Further:

"The Draft Declaration implicitly ruled out any major change in the form of the Constitution during the war". (*ibid.*, p. 31).

The post-war proposals were thus of only hypothetical interest and had no bearing on the urgent wartime problem of the mobilisation of the Indian people under a National Government of their own leaders. These post-war proposals would indeed be open to weighty objection on the grounds of their denial of the principles of democracy and self-determination, if this issue were of any present practical importance.

(1) Independence is denied to India, although this is the demand of all sections in India, and Dominion Status is to be imposed, although this has been rejected by all sections in India;

(2) The "constitution-making body", in place of being a Constituent Assembly elected by universal adult suffrage, as proposed by the Congress, would be elected on the basis of the restricted, gerrymandered and unrepresentative electoral system of the 1935 Constitution (described on page 153), with a franchise of 11 per cent of the population and weighted communal divisions;

(3) The Princes' representatives on the "constitution-making body", numbering one-quarter of the whole, would not need to be elected at all, thus disfranchising an additional 90 millions of the Indian population;

(4) The proposals for the partition of India would encourage the formation of a series of Ulsters in India, in defiance of Indian national feeling;

(5) The retention by the British Government of the right to determine at its own discretion what constitutes "provision, in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities" could be interpreted to cover the widest interference with the new constitution in practice, and negates Dominion Status (contrast the unchecked legislative discrimination against the racial majority in South Africa).

These questions, however, are only of academic interest. The fate of India after the war will not be settled by paper documents of this character. On the contrary, the fate of post-war India, as of the post-war world, is being shaped in the crucible of present events.

The crux of the Cripps Plan turned on the present wartime proposals. The text of these is important to set out:

"During the critical period which now faces India and until the new Constitution can be framed, His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their

world war effort, but the task of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India."

Did this elaborate statement cover any suggestion of a National Government with effective powers, comparable to a Cabinet in a democratic country, subject to the overriding control of the direction of the war by the United Nations Councils and their military command in the field? The Indian national leaders in the beginning of their negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps gathered from him the impression that it did. Later, it was made emphatically clear that it did not, that the Viceroy would retain absolute power and discretion, as at present, and that no important change in constitutional practice could be considered during the war. On this the negotiations broke down.

In these negotiations the Congress went to considerable lengths of concessions in the hope of reaching a positive settlement, offering to serve under a British Viceroy, provided they had real responsibility and powers, and to accept a British Commander-in-Chief, not only for the control of military operations, but as a member of the Cabinet.

In vain. They were told that British power must remain absolute and dictatorial, that an Indian Minister of Defence might at the most control canteens and stationery. When they tried to negotiate, in order to narrow the margin of disagreement, they were told, "Take it or leave it." This "take it or leave it" attitude gave the impression that there was no real intention to negotiate, but rather to prepare the grounds for a future conflict.

This impression was strengthened by the unfortunate speech of Lord Halifax on April 7, while the negotiations were still in progress, already anticipating failure and declaring that the British Government would in that event maintain power alone and that the Cripps Mission would have served its purpose in establishing an unanswerable case against future critics of British power in India.

The final resolution of the Congress rejecting the proposals declared:

"Any proposal concerning the future of India must demand attention and scrutiny, but in to-day's grave crisis it is the

present that counts. . . . For this the present British War Cabinet's proposals are vague and altogether incomplete, and there would appear to be no vital changes in the present structure contemplated. . . .

"The essential fundamental prerequisite for the assumption of responsibility by the Indian people is their realisation as a fact that they are free and are in charge of maintaining and defending their freedom. . . . The present Government of India, as well as its Provincial agencies, are lacking in competence and are incapable of shouldering the burden of India's defence. It is only the people of India, through their popular representatives, who may shoulder this burden worthily. But this can only be done by present freedom and full responsibility being cast upon them. The Committee are therefore unable to accept the proposals put forward by the British War Cabinet."

The Cripps Mission failed, not primarily because of the highly dubious character of the post-war plan which it offered, nor because of the political divisions in India which were only subsequently brought forward as a reason for failure.<sup>1</sup>

It failed because, under cover of the dubious post-war plan, it

<sup>1</sup> The myth that the Cripps negotiations broke down, not because of the refusal of Indian self-government by the British authorities, but because of the inability of the Indian representatives to agree among themselves, owing to their communal divisions, has been sedulously spread by official propaganda. It was given initial currency by Sir Stafford Cripps' very misleading broadcast after the breakdown, when he declared that "The War Cabinet were in a position rather like an arbitrator who tries to arrange a fair compromise between conflicting points of view" (a curious kind of "arbitrator" engaged in maintaining his despotic power against a subject nation demanding freedom), and drawing the moral of the breakdown that "some day, somehow, the great communities and parties in India will have to agree".

This myth was exploded by Nehru's explicit statement that "at no stage during the talks did any communal or minority difficulty occur". Confronted with this statement in the House of Commons on April 28, 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps was compelled to admit that "it is quite true that I did not discuss the minority question with Congress" and that "it was not in form on the communal question that the breakdown came".

Another myth given currency by Sir Stafford Cripps in the House of Commons on September 11, 1942, alleged that the Congress Working Committee had adopted an unpublished resolution accepting the proposals, but that Gandhi then intervened and secured the reversal of the decision. This allegation was immediately repudiated by Gandhi, Nehru and Rajagopalachariar; and their evidence must be accepted as more authoritative on this point, as they were present at the proceedings of the Congress Working Committee (though Gandhi was in fact absent from Delhi in the later stages), and Sir Stafford Cripps was not.

These myths (and many more, for which space cannot be spared) are only of interest as evidence of the guilty conscience of British official policy, which is unwilling to admit the plain cause of the breakdown through the refusal of Indian self-government.

rejected out of hand and ruled out the one issue that mattered—the establishment of a responsible National Government now with effective powers for Indian participation in the war. This rejection, it was made clear, was independent of the agreement or disagreement of the various sections of Indian political opinion. The elaborate hypothetical post-war plan was only the window-dressing to cover the rejection of the one real present issue.

This rejection ran counter to the entire range of Indian opinion, including the most moderate opinion. Not only the Congress, but every important Indian organisation turned down the Cripps proposals.

On the breakdown the *Calcutta Statesman* gave its verdict:

“So long as the India Office and the Government of India draft the proposals, no emissary can succeed, and no effort will be made to cope with the hourly increasing danger to this country. . . .

“The blame lies with the India Office and the official section of the Government of India.”

Nehru declared:

“If Sir Stafford thinks that the position in India has improved by his visit, he is grievously mistaken. The gulf is greater to-day than before.”

### 3. *Non-Co-operation and Conflict*

Deterioration in the political situation rapidly followed the breakdown of the Cripps negotiations.

The British Government declared that nothing more could be done, and embarked on a campaign of extremely partisan propaganda to blacken the Indian national movement, and to prove to world opinion with all the age-old arguments the supposedly unrepresentative character of the Congress, the hopeless political divisions of the Indian people and their incapacity for self-government.

The National Congress, frustrated in its desire to co-operate, after a period of hesitancy and divided counsels, slid down the inclined plane towards non-co-operation as the weapon to enforce the national demand.

A plea was put forward by a section of Congress opinion, represented by the Madras ex-Premier, C. Rajagopalachariar, and by the Indian Communists, for a more positive policy, despite the British rejection of the Indian national claim, to endeavour to build a National Front in agreement with the Moslem League and all other organisations, even at the expense of concessions to sectional demands, for the sake of organising united national resistance in the hour of danger against Japan. This proposal was

rejected by the All-India Congress Committee in May by 120 votes to 15, although the Congress President, Maulana Azad, made clear that the Congress would be prepared to nominate a delegation to negotiate with the Moslem League in order to reach a common basis. Mr. Rajagopalachariar resigned from the Congress to pursue the advocacy of his policy.

Direct leadership of the Congress passed back into the hands of Gandhi, who had been removed from leadership since December, 1941. Gandhi was preaching his pacifist doctrine of (1) non-violent resistance to Japan; (2) non-co-operation with the British authorities; (3) moral sympathy for the Allied cause against Fascism; (4) endeavour to keep India out of the conflict, and opposition to Nehru's advocacy of armed resistance, the formation of guerillas and a "scorched earth" policy. The Congress did not agree with Gandhi's pacifism, but moved over to regard his proposals of non-co-operation as the only remaining weapon to win Indian freedom and thus make possible the effective defence of India. Conversations between Gandhi, Nehru and Azad in June resulted in a basis of agreement being reached, which found fruit in the non-co-operation resolution adopted by the Working Committee on July 14. Serious anti-fascist leaders and advocates of co-operation with the United Nations thus passed into the wake of Gandhi and his dangerous proposals for a non-co-operation campaign at the moment of threatening Japanese attack.

Axis propaganda was delighted and applauded the Congress. The followers of S. C. Bose, the Axis agent, found favourable ground for extending their penetration, which the Congress noted with alarm ("this frustration has resulted in a rapid and widespread increase of ill-will against Britain, and a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms; the Working Committee view this development with grave apprehension"—Congress Working Committee resolution of July 14).

Unscrupulous reactionary propaganda in British official circles also utilised the new opportunity to blacken the Congress. In place of recognising the bankruptcy of a policy which had thus driven the principal anti-fascist leaders and advocates of co-operation with the United Nations, like Nehru and Azad, into the wake of Gandhi and non-co-operation, this outcome was treated as a triumphant vindication of official policy. The opportunity was seized to parade every characteristic utterance of Gandhi, advocating pacifism and appeasement, with the widest publicity throughout India and the world, in order to brand the whole national movement as capitulationist and ready to make peace with Japan. The bombshell publication of documents seized in a police raid in order to expose facts already well known from

Gandhi's public articles illustrated this technique of preparation for future conflict.

Undoubtedly the resumption of leadership by Gandhi as "Generalissimo" of the Congress (the title accorded him) was a heavy liability for the Indian national movement, and has done grave harm in the eyes of world opinion, which inevitably confuses the pacifist and appeasement views of Gandhi with the viewpoint of Indian Nationalism. But it is fair to recognise that the personal viewpoint of Gandhi in respect of non-violence and appeasement has been explicitly repudiated by every official Congress statement and resolution.

The Congress resolution on non-co-operation was put out in July and finally adopted in an amended form on August 8 (against an opposition vote of 13, led by the Indian Communist Party, whose restoration of legal rights on July 22 was a sign of its growing influence and strength).

This resolution reaffirmed sympathy for the United Nations and the demand for recognition of India as a free ally under a National Government for armed resistance to Fascism in co-operation with the United Nations:

"An immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity both for the sake of India and the success of the cause of the United Nations. . . .

"On the declaration of India's independence a Provisional Government will be formed, and Free India will become the ally of the United Nations, sharing with them in the trials and tribulations of the joint enterprise and struggle for freedom.

"A Provisional Government can only be formed by the co-operation of the principal parties and groups in the country. . . . Its primary function must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed, as well as the non-violent, forces at its command, together with the Allied Powers. . . .

"Future relations between India and the Allied Nations will be adjusted by representatives of all these free countries conferring together for their mutual advantage and for their co-operation in the common task of resisting aggression. . . .

"The Committee is anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations."

So far the resolution is one that would enjoy the support of the wide body of democratic and anti-fascist opinion throughout the world. But the concluding section laid down the programme of non-co-operation in the event of refusal of the national demand:



"The All-India Congress Committee would yet again, at this last moment, in the interests of world freedom, renew this appeal to Britain and the United Nations.

"But the Committee feels that it is no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against the imperialist and authoritarian government which dominates it and prevents it from functioning in its own interests and in the interests of humanity.

"The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale so that the country may utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last 22 years of peaceful struggle.

"Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhi, and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken."

Reaction above had thus produced reaction below. To the fatal policy of the British Government was now added the fatal policy of the Congress, both leading to division in the face of the common enemy.

What impelled the leaders of Indian Nationalism to adopt this catastrophic policy of non-co-operation at the very moment of the greatest crisis of the world war, with impending Japanese attack on India? It was no reckless spirit of defiance, narrow nationalism or indifference to consequences that urged such outstanding internationalists, anti-fascists and sincere patriots as Nehru and other leaders to this course. They felt driven to it, against their own wishes, because every effort to win co-operation on a free basis had failed, and they could see no alternative policy remaining to mobilise the Indian people and ensure the effective defence of India in the urgent war crisis.

The anti-fascist working-class sections of the national movement represented by the Indian Communist Party had from the outset put forward a clear and consistent line in relation to the war of liberation through a positive response to the tasks and responsibilities raised by the war.<sup>1</sup> They showed concretely how such a positive response was possible and essential, despite the resistance of British reaction to Indian popular initiative or the national demand. On this basis they set out their positive

<sup>1</sup> The policy of the Indian Communist Party will be found set out in the booklet "Forward to Freedom", by P. C. Joshi, Secretary of the Party, published in India in February, 1942, and reprinted in abbreviated form in this country under the title "The Indian Communist Party".

alternative programme to non-co-operation in the existing critical situation:

(1) to build up the united National Front in India, including the unity of the Congress, the Moslem League and all other political sections, on a common platform of resistance to Fascism;

(2) on the basis of such a National Front to press the demand for a settlement and for a National Government, with the united support of all sections;

(3) while pressing the just political demand, to co-operate wholeheartedly in the war effort and the mobilisation of the people, and to initiate unofficial measures of popular mobilisation under the leadership of the national movement in order to strengthen the war effort and capacity of national resistance to Fascism;

(4) resolute rejection of all policies of non-co-operation as fatal to the interests of the Indian people.

But with the existing embitterment of national feeling, and the reactionary refusal by British ruling circles of the demand for a National Government, this policy was not yet able to win the support of the bulk of the national movement.

The majority leaders of Indian Nationalism hoped by a short, sharp struggle (Vallabhai Patel, Gandhi's principal lieutenant, spoke of victory in a week, though Gandhi declared on this that "if it ends in a week, it would be a miracle") to establish Indian national freedom in time to be in an enormously stronger position to resist Japanese aggression and act as an effective ally of the United Nations. Such success would, they were confident, justify their tactics as the best defence of India and the best contribution to world victory over Fascism. The suicidal blindness of this calculation is manifest. The apostles of non-violence, who for twenty-two years had failed to shake the citadel of British power by their methods, expected now by a similar campaign to secure a transference of power within a few weeks in time to meet the Japanese invader at the gates. Alternately, if they hoped to see their campaign develop to a violent mass revolt, they only revealed how lightly a movement trained to non-violence estimated the prospects of a revolutionary struggle for power by an unarmed population in the midst of war, with the invading armies on the frontiers. They ignored the plain overshadowing menace that their campaign would lead, not to the victory of Indian freedom, but to internal conflict, chaos and paralysis, opening the way to the victory of Fascism in India. Their policy, as the Indian Communist Party bluntly declared, was equivalent to "cutting our

own throats. It weakens the defence of the country against aggressors and makes the task of the Fascist invader easier."

The policy of non-co-operation was a policy of desperation. But the leaders who adopted it were in fact striving to reach a basis of co-operation; they made openly plain that they hoped never to launch their campaign, and sought to reach a settlement first. However much we must condemn the policy which could propose a campaign of non-co-operation in such a situation, the heaviest burden of responsibility must rest on that reactionary policy which, by refusing India's just demands and throttling the eager desire to co-operate upon equal terms, provoked this desperate outcome.

To the last the Congress showed every desire to reach a settlement and to negotiate. The resolution was revised to stress the desire for a practical settlement and for co-operation in armed resistance to Fascism. The final speeches of Gandhi and Nehru stressed the desire to negotiate. Nehru stated in his final reply to the debate: "The resolution is not a threat; it is an invitation and an explanation; it is an offer of co-operation." Gandhi's subsequently published letter to Marshal Chiang Kai Shek in July made clear that he "will take no hasty action, and whatever action is taken will be governed by the consideration that it should not injure China or encourage Japanese aggression in India or China: I am straining every nerve to avoid a conflict with British authority." It was explained that the first step would be a letter to the Viceroy proposing negotiations before there would be any question of launching any action.

The letter was begun immediately after the close of the Congress Committee, but was not at the time allowed to be finished. Within a few hours the wholesale arrests followed which opened the present conflict.

The Congress resolution was adopted on August 8. On the morning of August 9, all the principal Congress leaders were arrested (148 in Bombay), including Gandhi, Nehru, Azad, Patel, Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad and others, and the Congress was declared an illegal organisation. The arrests were followed by conflict and disorders in a number of centres, which were met by police and military action, resulting in a considerable number of killed and wounded.

The arrests precipitated the open conflict and disorders, and in this way fulfilled the rôle of a direct provocation, almost as if to prevent the offered negotiations.

It is difficult to see how this deliberate decision for a policy of repression in preference to negotiations can be regarded as justified by the situation. Once the disorders began, it was

inevitable that the Government should take action against them. But it was the arrests which provoked the disorders, not the disorders which provoked the arrests.

At the moment of the arrests, at the close of the Congress Committee session, there was no such immediate urgency to justify the argument of the supposed imperative necessity to precipitate the conflict. No order for civil disobedience had been given. There were obviously no plans of action ready. The aim of the Congress was manifestly to negotiate. The disorders which were provoked by the arrests were disowned by the Congress and condemned by the Congress press.

It is not easy to escape the impression that the precipitation of the conflict in this way was dictated by reactionary interests in ruling circles which were more concerned to utilise a favourable tactical opportunity for crushing the Congress and the popular movements in India than in winning Indian co-operation against Japan.

Since the opening of the conflict on August 9, the veil of censorship has heavily covered the extent of the crisis and disorders which have developed in India. According to the preliminary report of the Government to the Legislative Assembly on September 14, police firing resulted in 340 killed and 850 wounded; in clashes with troops 318 were killed and 153 wounded; 31 police, 11 troops and 7 civilian officials were killed; 550 post offices were attacked, 53 being burned; 250 railway stations were attacked, and there were 24 derailments; strikes of varying extent developed in a number of centres (the principal being Ahmedabad, Gandhi's centre), though not taking on the character of a general movement among the industrial workers; the principal disturbances were in United Provinces and Bihar (centres of agrarian unrest); "for a considerable period Bengal was almost completely cut off from Northern India".

Despite a number of moves promoted by wide sections of Indian opinion, as well as outside India, with a view to furthering negotiations and a settlement, the Prime Minister's speech to Parliament on September 10 closed the door on these attempts, and emphatically re-affirmed the Government's policy in a form which could not but increase the hostility of Indian national feeling and thus provoke the further development of the conflict.

Such was the grave situation in India when the ending of the monsoon period brought close the menace of attack of the Japanese armies on the frontiers.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

"The interests of Indian democracy do not conflict with the interests of British democracy or of world democracy."—*Indian National Congress, Resolution of September 15, 1939.*

1. *The Basis of Negotiations*

CAN A solution be found for the present dangerous situation in India?

Despite the extreme stage of crisis, deadlock and conflict which has been reached, and the narrow margin of time within which further steps may be attempted, there is every reason to say that a solution can be achieved, and rapidly achieved, given the will to overcome the difficulties and face the necessary conditions of a new policy. The very extremity of the danger should hasten the solution. But there is no time to lose.

We cannot afford to continue this suicidal conflict between two freedom-loving nations, with Fascism battering at the doors of both. Although General Wavell, in his broadcast at the end of September, 1942, has discounted the likelihood of any imminent Japanese attempt at invasion, it is obvious that no responsible policy, whether of the Indian national movement or of the British Government, can base its calculations on the assumption of ignoring this menace. The urgent necessity of a settlement, before still more disastrous consequences follow, is recognised by all serious opinion. What must be done?

Events in India, as in the whole world situation, are moving with extreme speed. New developments, whether they take the form of Japanese military invasion, or of further political moves or re-grouping within India, or a modification of the British Government's policy, or even United Nations' intervention, may profoundly affect the situation in the near future. It is therefore only possible to deal with the general principles which must govern any settlement, in relation to the existing situation at the time of writing (October, 1942).

The necessary final basis of a permanent settlement, that is, the complete freedom and independence of India, with only voluntary association, entirely free from coercion, whether with Britain or with other States in the world, has already been indicated.

Our present problem is to find, within this general aim, the basis of a speedy and practical provisional settlement between Britain, India and the United Nations. The object of such a settlement must be to end the present conflict and enable India

to co-operate as a free nation in meeting the dangers arising from the war.

That such a settlement is imperative, is widely agreed. It is true that British official policy up to the present still maintains a negative attitude, opposes new negotiations, regards the Cripps offer as the final word, and proclaims its satisfaction that the situation is "in hand". But this blind complacency, in face of the glaring dangers of the existing situation, is scarcely shared by any outside official circles. Even the moderate judgement of *The Times* found it necessary to comment on Mr. Churchill's speech of September 10, when he said that "the situation in India at the moment gives no occasion for undue despondency or alarm":

"The situation, nevertheless, is full of hazard. . . . Though no settlement could be reached by taking account of Congress opinion alone, it is equally true that no settlement can be made which ignores it; and it is also true that the demand for independence which is the basis of Congress policy is heard not less insistently from all the other leading Indian political groups. To rally the good-will of all Indians at a moment when the enemy is at the gate is a task of supreme importance" (*Times*, September 11, 1942).

Such a plea for a settlement which should meet, in place of repelling, the Indian national demand, could be widely paralleled from the most diverse quarters. In this connection the viewpoint of the Bishop of Calcutta and Metropolitan of India may be quoted:

"That force has been employed must not be allowed to rule conference out of court. Within the Congress there are strong elements on the side of active participation in the war effort and in complete alignment with the Allied Nations. The creation of a council chosen by the real leaders of the political parties of India with real executive power now would unite all in the common war front."

A settlement implies negotiations. The first step to be taken to end the present conflict and reach a settlement is to open negotiations with the National Congress leaders, whose co-operation is indispensable to an effective settlement, as with all representative Indian political leaders.

The opening of negotiations with the authoritative political leaders of India will be the most effective initial measure to create a new situation and suspend the present conflict, just as the reaching of a settlement will end its causes. The objection has been put forward that negotiations cannot be opened until Con-

gress abandons civil disobedience. This is to put the cart before the horse. It should be remembered that Congress, up to the time of writing, had not yet launched the civil disobedience campaign, and was explicitly asking to negotiate before launching any campaign. In this context the demand for prior conditions becomes an obstructionist demand to hinder negotiations, when it is only negotiations which can remove the obstacles to agreement and thus remove the causes which led to the adoption of the civil disobedience resolution. The present urgent situation is no time for standing on punctilio, but requires the instant and unconditional opening of negotiations with a view to finding the common basis for agreement in the imperative interests of both nations.

What must be the basis of negotiations? This is the decisive question, if the negotiations are to be successful. We cannot afford to repeat the Cripps fiasco.

The conditions of the problem, as well as the declarations of representative sections of Indian opinion, have made clear the indispensable basis of negotiations in order to make possible an effective and honourable settlement. Such a basis should comprise three main governing principles, the details of whose execution will need to be worked out by the negotiators:

- (1) Recognition of Indian independence;
- (2) Establishment of a Provisional National Government representative of all political sections and leaders willing to co-operate in the common task of armed resistance to fascist aggression as an ally of the United Nations;
- (3) Provision for the effective military co-operation of India and the United Nations.

## *2. Recognition of Indian Independence*

The demand for the recognition of Indian independence is common to all sections of Indian opinion, not merely the National Congress, but equally the Moslem League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Liberals and non-party political leaders.

This demand (partly owing to the misleading form of its summary presentation in the Congress "Quit India" slogan) has been widely misrepresented as a wildly unpractical proposal for the sudden withdrawal of all British civil and military representatives from India, leaving chaos and anarchy. So Sir Stafford Cripps:

"For the British to leave India would endanger the life and safety of every European, American and Chinese soldier and civilian, and would create a wide breach in the United Nations' front.

"It would mean that India would be left without any con-

stitution or government. There would be no election law, no constituencies, no elected assembly, no civil service administration, no courts of justice, no police. It would be the ideal of the true anarchist and an irresistible temptation to Japan."

(Sir Stafford Cripps, *New York Times*, August, 1942, quoted in the *British Press*, August 24, 1942.)

On this fanciful picture, given in similar terms by Mr. Amery in the House of Commons on July 30, and by Sir Stafford Cripps on August 5, the brief comment of the Indian National Congress President, Maulana Azad, was, "Absurd". He proceeded to explain the elementary fact that the demand for the withdrawal of British power from India was a demand, not for the collapse of political authority, but for a transfer of power.

The recognition of Indian independence means, not a proposal for the sudden disappearance of all governmental authority in India, leaving a hiatus and chaos, but *the transfer of effective governmental power from British to Indian hands.*

The method of this transfer requires to be negotiated in the settlement to be reached and in the constitution of the Provisional National Government. The final regulation of the future relations of Britain and India can only be reached in long-term negotiations, possibly even after the war, between British and Indian representatives. The immediate settlement will of necessity be short-term and provisional in character, and even full of superficial contradictions.

The National Congress leaders, in the Cripps negotiations, showed themselves perfectly ready to agree to the formation of a National Government which would in form operate as the Executive Council of the British Viceroy under the existing constitution, providing an understanding were reached that it would have real collective power and responsibility, with the Viceroy acting like a constitutional sovereign; and they showed themselves similarly ready to co-operate with a British Commander-in-Chief in supreme military control.

This possibility of a rapid provisional settlement, in which the effective powers of the Indian National Government would be established by convention, even within the existing constitutional forms (or by a brief special enactment), disposes of the difficulty often put forward by official quarters as insuperable, that such far-reaching constitutional changes as are involved in the independence of India cannot be put through in wartime. On the contrary, it is precisely in wartime that the most rapid and far-reaching constitutional changes may be necessary, if statesmanship is not to lag behind the practical needs of the situation; war



is no respecter of legal niceties or routine; and the Japanese have not been held back by insuperable constitutional difficulties from very considerably changing the constitutional status of Burma at short notice. At the time of the collapse of France in the spring of 1940 it was not found impossible for the British Government to propose at a moment's notice such a considerable constitutional change as the merging of Britain and France into a single State. But in the case of India a speedy provisional settlement is possible, even within the existing framework, provided the principle of independence is recognised, leaving ultimate constitutional forms to be elaborated through the machinery of a democratically elected constituent assembly after the termination of hostilities.

The one essential principle of the provisional settlement, implicit in the recognition of Indian independence, is that *effective control of Indian affairs must be in the hands of a Government representative of the Indian people*. Whatever temporary limitations in the exercise or form of that power may be mutually agreed, in response to the practical needs of the war or to the conditions of the transition, should be reached by voluntary consent and not by coercion.

This is the principle of Indian independence which should be unreservedly recognised.

### 3. *A Provisional Government of National Unity*

The Provisional National Government to be formed and to take over supreme political control in India should be a Government of National Unity. It should not be the monopoly of any single political section or party. It should draw in all political sections and leaders prepared to co-operate on the broadest common platform of the maintenance of Indian independence and armed resistance to fascist aggression.

All political sections and leaders should be invited to participate, on a basis of representation to be mutually agreed by negotiations. But none should be empowered to veto the formation of a National Government by refusal to co-operate, or to impose prior conditions. All controversial questions of the ultimate constitutional settlement should be held over till the termination of hostilities.

Can such a Government of National Unity be formed in the present situation in India? Spokesmen of British official policy emphatically deny that this can be achieved, owing to Indian political divisions. Thus a correspondent in *The Times* of September 25, 1942, repeats the familiar argument:

"Mr. Jinnah, who leads 90,000,000 Moslems, and Dr. Ambedkar, who leads 50,000,000 Depressed Classes, have vigorously and unequivocally set their heart and mind

against the Congress, and this puts the tin hat on the prospects of any National Government being formed in India now or in the near future."

Similarly Mr. Churchill in his speech to parliament on September 10:

"The Congress Party does not represent all India. It does not represent the majority of the people of India. . . . Outside that party and fundamentally opposed to it are 90,000,000 Moslems, who have their rights of self-expression, 50,000,000 Depressed Classes . . . and 95,000,000 subjects of the Princes, to whom we are bound by treaty. In all, there are 235,000,000 in these three groups out of a total of about 390,000,000 in India."<sup>1</sup>

And Sir Walter Citrine at the Trades Union Congress in September warned delegates not to assume

"a unity that did not exist in India. 70,000,000 Moslems said that if self-government were handed to the Hindus there would be civil war; and to say the 70,000,000 Untouchables would be content if their destiny were put into the hands of Congress was utter nonsense. If to-morrow so-called self-government were handed to India there would be such internal strife that the Japanese could walk in."

While no one would wish to minimise the serious problem which the Indian nation must solve in achieving national unity and a United National Government, this kind of presentation is a fantastic distortion of the real problem. It is no use presenting to the British public an imaginary picture of Mr. Jinnah and the Moslem League leading a solid block of 90,000,000 Moslems, when he has not been able to win 5 per cent of the Moslem vote in the elections; when two of the three Moslem Premiers repudiate the Moslem League, while the fourth Moslem province elected a Congress majority. It is equally no use presenting an imaginary picture of 50,000,000 Depressed Classes (or whatever number is preferred, for the number has been given at all levels from

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately for Mr. Churchill's arithmetic, he has counted his Moslems in the Indian States twice over; once in the total of Moslems for all India, including the States, and then again in the total of subjects of the States. But this is only a minor illustration of the fanciful partisan character of this total calculation, in which the 90,000,000 Moslems, the majority of whom, through their elected representatives, have rejected Mr. Jinnah and the Moslem League and are striving for a basis of unity with the Congress, are counted as supporters of Mr. Jinnah against the Congress; the alleged 50,000,000 Depressed Classes, the majority of whom have elected Congress candidates, are counted as opponents of the Congress; while the 95,000,000 subjects of the Princes are coolly added, whose opinion has never been allowed to be expressed.

15,000,000 to 70,000,000, according to the fancy of the propagandist) supporting Dr. Ambedkar against the Congress, when of the 151 Depressed Classes constituencies Dr. Ambedkar was only able to win 13, or less than 9 per cent, while Congress candidates won 78, or the majority.

It is necessary to make a more realist approach to this question. For present purposes we need not concern ourselves too closely with the representative or unrepresentative character of the various minority and splinter groupings and organisations, without figures of membership or electoral support, which have been inflated and publicised to an artificial importance by the conditions of foreign rule and special encouragement and protection of their anti-national sectionalism.

In the present national crisis the national movement must be prepared to make far-reaching concessions for the sake of national unity; and the Congress leaders have shown understanding of this, just as the most serious and responsible representatives of other sections have shown similar understanding. The Provisional National Government must be a Coalition Government of all the principal political sections and leaders willing to participate, without too close scrutiny of the representative basis of their claims.

The principal obstacle to such agreement is the refusal of national self-government. This perpetuates the divisions, which are then made the excuse for refusing self-government. So long as self-government is refused, and British absolute power is maintained, it follows inevitably that the maximum intransigence of every sectional and splinter grouping and organisation is encouraged, because every such organisation looks to the paramount Power to protect its sectional claims, and finds in these, instead of in consideration for the well-being of India, the sole reason for its political existence.

But so soon as this artificial sustaining prop is removed, normal political considerations hold sway as in other countries; and common danger, common national need and common emergency become the cement which binds together national unity.

If once the firm policy of the establishment of a responsible National Government is definitively adopted, with invitation to participate to every political section and leadership willing to co-operate in the common effort, but with the no less firm declaration that no veto or self-exclusion of any section will be allowed to hold up the scheme, then the imagined insurmountable obstacles will be possible to be overcome, and a Government of representative men of good will from all political sections can be established with the enthusiastic support of the Indian nation.

This is the path of statesmanship and of serious mobilisation of India against Fascism.

There are strong grounds for declaring that the overwhelming majority of all sections in India would support such a solution. On the same day that Mr. Churchill made his statement in the House of Commons parading Indian political divisions, a united statement was issued in India urging him to declare India's independence forthwith to enable representatives of the major political parties to form a truly representative National Government. The signatories included the Moslem Premiers of Bengal and Sind, the Nawab of Dacca, the President of the Momin Conference, and the Hindu Mahasabha leaders. The same demand has been supported by Liberal and non-Party leaders such as Sir Tej Sapru and Mr. Jayakar; by representatives of moderate opinion such as Mr. Rajagopalachariar, the former Congress Premier of Madras, who resigned from the Congress in order to promote Congress-Moslem League agreement, with the sympathetic support of influential elements in the Moslem League; by Mr. N. M. Joshi, Labour representative in the Legislative Assembly and Secretary of the All-India Trade Union Congress; by the Communist Party of India; by the All-India Akali Sikh Conference; by the Indian Christians; by the All-India Kisan Sabha (Peasant League) and other bodies. Indeed, it may be said that this demand is supported by 95 per cent of political representatives and leaders in India.

The basis undoubtedly exists for the establishment of a Provisional National Government in India which would be both widely representative, associating the National Congress and other sections and elements in a broad national front, and would command real authority.

Finally, the objection is raised that, in the absence of democratic institutions in India, such a Provisional National Government would be an "irresponsible dictatorship", since it would not be answerable to any elected body. The argument is a curious one to come from the upholders of the existing really irresponsible and dictatorial system of foreign rule in India. These passionate opponents of dictatorship would seek to maintain the absolute dictatorship of a Linlithgow or an Amery over the Indian people in order to save them from the supposed "dictatorship" of their own national leaders. In practice it would not be difficult, even without new elections, to constitute some emergency representative organ for present purposes, possibly on the basis of the elected Indian representatives in the present Central Legislative Assembly or of the Provincial Assemblies, or on some wider representative basis. But in the immediate crisis with which we

are faced, even in the absence of such machinery, it is obvious that such a National Government, composed of the principal leaders of Indian national life and of the great popular organisations, would be infinitely more representative and more capable of mobilising the support of the Indian people than the present system.

#### 4. *Treaty of Alliance between India and the United Nations*

A Treaty of Alliance would need to be drawn up between the Indian National Government and the United Nations, in order to ensure effective military co-operation for the defence of India and in the common war against the Axis.

Such a provision is equally essential in the interests of the defence of India, and in the interests of the United Nations, who cannot afford to be in any uncertainty as to the full participation of a free India in the common struggle and full provision of all requirements for practical co-operation. There is no question here of imposing from the outside any obligation against the wishes of the Indian people. The explicit declarations of all representative Indian political leaders and organisations have made clear their support of the cause of the United Nations against Fascism and their desire that India should mobilise its full strength as an ally of the United Nations. The personal pacifist views of Gandhi are not an obstacle to prevent the realisation of this policy, since he has made clear that he will subordinate his personal views to the pledged policy of the Congress for armed resistance to Fascism in alliance with the United Nations.

Such a Treaty will need to ensure the supreme military authority of the United Nations, and of the Commander-in-Chief appointed by the United Nations, in co-operation with the Indian National Government, in all questions of the direct conduct of the war. It may well be that the most effective machinery for securing such a policy will be through the establishment of a United Nations War Council in India, or in South-Eastern Asia, uniting the representatives of the principal Allied Powers engaged in hostilities in this region with a representative of the Indian National Government.

The relationship between the Indian National Government and the United Nations Commander-in-Chief in India would be comparable to the relationship between the Australian Government and General MacArthur.

Once the principle of Indian independence and voluntary alliance with the United Nations is established, the difficulties, which proved so insuperable in the Cripps negotiations, in respect of the demarcation of functions of an Indian Minister of

Commander-in-Chief in India, would prove capable of solution in a practical fashion, because the basis of co-operation would exist.

This is the only basis on which the effective mobilisation and co-operation of the 400,000,000 of India can be secured, which can and must play such a decisive rôle in the defence of Asia against Fascism. The recent announcement that no "scorched earth" policy will be attempted in India (since a "scorched earth" policy, as the examples of the Soviet Union and China have shown, can only be carried out by a popular Government with the active support and participation of the people), or the subsequent announcement that offensive operations against Japan must be delayed, because of the difficulties of communications, supplies and the uncertain situation in India, illustrate the urgency of such a settlement, even if viewed only from the military standpoint.

### 5. *British Opinion and India*

Can such a solution be acceptable to British opinion?

Despite the present stone-wall opposition of British Government expression, there is reason to judge that such a settlement would be welcomed by the majority of British opinion, and that the demand for such a settlement is growing among wide sections in all political camps.

The contrast between the present policy of repression and refusal of self-government pursued in India, and the democratic outlook of the majority of the British nation, or the democratic aims of the war against Fascism, is too glaring to be easily accepted.

Further, the powerful military arguments of the present situation daily reinforce the urgent need of a settlement.

There is a growing body of opinion in all sections which has directly expressed the demand for the opening of negotiations and for a settlement along the lines indicated. It is true that the National Council of Labour declaration of August 12, immediately following the arrests, wholly endorsed the action of the Government, and directed its criticism only against the Indian political leaders, opposing negotiations until the abandonment of civil disobedience by the Congress. This declaration was ratified by the Trades Union Congress in September, although in the face of considerable opposition.

But it can be confidently stated, as the increasingly critical note in subsequent parliamentary debates has shown, that this un-critical support of the Government's negative policy is not representative of the general body of labour and democratic opinion.

A wide range of leading political personalities, and of religious leaders, and such representative press organs as the *Manchester Guardian*, *News-Chronicle*, *Evening Standard*, and also the *Daily Herald* (until the official Labour declaration compelled a reversal of policy), and to a certain extent *The Times*, have taken a critical line in respect of the Government's Indian policy and urged the necessity of negotiations.

The Amalgamated Engineering Union National Committee, representing 600,000 key workers in war industry, unanimously adopted the following resolution for Indian independence and free co-operation in the common struggle against Fascism on June 20, 1942:

"This National Committee expresses its opinion that the complete freedom of the Indian people is an essential prerequisite in a people's war for freedom, democracy and victory over the barbaric bestial order of Fascism.

"This National Committee calls upon the Labour Movement to demand from the Government that the tenets of the Atlantic Charter shall be declared to include the independence of India.

"We further declare our conviction that the freedom of the Indian people would be a strategical move, ensuring that unity, superiority of resources and man-power in the Pacific that would include an early victory in the war against the Axis Powers. We feel that in view of the serious situation in the Pacific and the Far East, it is essential that the freedom of these peoples be obtained now."

The Miners' Federation National Conference on August 1, 1942, representing half a million miners, unanimously adopted a resolution for the re-opening of negotiations on the basis of recognition of India's claim to independence:

"This Conference of the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain recognises the grave situation which has arisen from the failure to settle the question of Indian relations, and the resulting deterioration that has taken place.

"We reaffirm our belief in the absolute necessity for securing the whole-hearted co-operation of the Indian people in the common struggle against Fascism and to preserve Democracy.

"We therefore call upon the Government to re-open negotiations with the Indian National Congress in an endeavour to secure a reasonable settlement of outstanding problems immediately with a view to the ultimate granting of complete independence.

"We urge the Government and the National Congress of

prise the grave danger in which both our countries are placed, and call upon both parties to approach the outstanding differences in a realistic manner and to take into account the present war situation."

Trial ballots in big factories have shown a ten to one vote for Indian independence.

The campaign of the 50,000 members of the Communist Party has followed the lines of the National Conference resolution adopted on May 25, 1942, which declared:—

"To win the co-operation of the 400 millions of India in the common struggle, we must recognise the independence of India as an equal partner in the alliance of the United Nations, and reopen negotiations with the National Congress for the establishment of a National Government with full powers, subject only to such restrictions as the Indian people are willing to accept in the interests of India and of the common struggle against the Axis Powers."

This demand has won enthusiastic support at crowded mass demonstrations all over the country.

There is no doubt that the influence of world opinion, and especially of the other chief partners of the alliance of the United Nations, is making itself increasingly felt in relation to the present Indian crisis, and is seeking to assist towards a solution. While much of American press comment has been withheld by censorship from appearing in this country, correspondents have been unanimous in reporting that the overwhelming majority of American comment has been critical of the negative line pursued and has urged the necessity of negotiations to reach a settlement ("American opinion is predominantly critical of the British official attitude", *Times*, October 6, 1942). The Chinese Government press has been open in its expression of sympathy with Indian national aspirations and pleas for a settlement on this basis. Thus the Chinese Government organ, the *Central Daily News*, wrote in August, 1942, following the arrests:

"We receive the news of the arrest of Gandhi, Nehru and Azad with the deepest regret. The arrests, irrespective of right and wrong, would inevitably affect Indians' confidence in the United Nations, and furnish Axis propaganda. Gandhi, Nehru and the others had the support of a majority of Indians, and their arrest will not solve the problem. If the conflict were allowed to continue, it would affect the entire war.

"We appeal to both sides to exercise patience and seek a settlement. There have been numerous precedents for a com-



promise in English political history, and we do not believe the dispute is beyond the possibility of compromise."

But, important as is the expression of opinion of the United Nations, it is here in Britain that the decisive responsibility rests. Democratic opinion in this country must play the foremost rôle in fulfilling this responsibility.

It is in the power of the British nation, by an act of statesmanship which would redound equally to its honour and practical advantage, to close the unhappy chapter of the past relations of Britain and India, and to open the new and fruitful chapter of the equal association of Britain and India and the nations of the world advancing in common partnership and comradeship as free nations in the struggle for human freedom and world co-operation.

